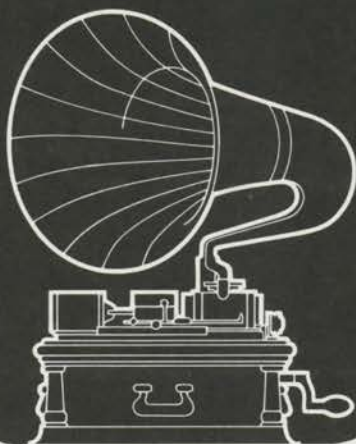


## For The Records



*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.*

**DENNIS JAMES: CLASSIC THEATRE ORGAN, played on the 4/20 Robert Morton organ in the Ohio Theatre, Columbus, and the Morton 4/24 in the Forum, Binghamton, N.Y. DLP - 107 (stereo). \$8.75 post-paid from Dennis James Productions, 29 East State Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215.**

It's been some time since we have reviewed a Dennis James album, and this one is a welcome addition to the file of grooves cut by this fine artist. Perhaps we'd best examine the tune-list first because this is a quite different James disc.

"March Slav" (Tchaikowsky), "Funeral March of a Marionette" (Gounod), "None But the Lonely Heart" (Tchaikowsky), "Waltz in E Flat" (Durand), all played on the Ohio Theatre Morton organ. "Marche Religieuse" (Guilmant), "Sleepers Awake" (J.S. Bach), "Fugue in C Major" (Buxtehude), "Noel Grand Jeu et Duo" (Daguin), played on the Forum Robert Morton organ.

All are classical selections, and played on a theatre organ instead of

a thin baroque, or better, a surviving romantic organ. Does it make sense? The answer is an unqualified "yes." Let us not forget that classic-schooled silent film accompanists such as Arthur Gutow, Albert Hay Malotte, and Herbert Henderson, to name a few, included such titles both in their film cueing and also as spotlight solos. So there is a precedent.

In addition, the Robert Morton organs adapt well to classical registration without losing their theatre organ thrust, either with or without tremulants. There are some of both modes here. Remember, the Morton company, which succeeded the Artcraft Organ Co. (builders of the instrument which became the nucleus of the Wanamaker store behemoth in Philly), was initially a maker of orthodox instruments, until a refugee from Hope-Jones' Elmira factory failure in 1910 laid out theatre organ specs for the company, which in the late 'teens was anxious to get in on the demand for instruments suitable for film accompaniment. Conversely, this is not a record for those who insist on light 32-measure tunes played with a definite beat.

The Ohio Theatre organ has been well-documented in past issues of this magazine, but this, to the best of our knowledge, is the first recording made on the Forum organ, with its three Tibias (one a rare Plena), two Voxes (10 Reeds total) and extended unification. It is played here mostly in the classical vein, so we don't know what it could do when played



Dennis James.

as a purveyor of pops and standards. It started life as a 4/17 in the American Theatre in Denver and has been rescued from a number of seemingly desperate situations by enthusiasts and the Binghamton Savings Bank, which bankrolled its way into the Forum. It would seem that the combined technical efforts of Bill Decker, Dick Ide, Andy Jarosik and George Melnyk should be credited for the excellence of an instrument which has seen so many moves and additions. It serves well as a purveyor of the classical themes recorded here.

True, many of the selections, especially the more ancient ones in counterpoint, have limited interest value for purely theatre organ fans, even though they demonstrate how well a Robert Morton can register such material. Yet, the excellence with which they are performed should arouse some value comparisons. And the more recognizable classics, especially on Side 1, should cinch the value offered here.

The jacket notes provide some puffery for Dennis and information about the organs. An insert bears both the stop analysis and the detailed stoplists for both instruments. Comparing the two is fascinating. Each Morton was complementary to the hall for which it was designed, and this is evident even after moves and additions.

Recording is good. If the listener has an appreciation for classical themes registered on a versatile theatre organ, this is for him.

**ROB CALCATERRA playing the 4/22 Wurlitzer organ in the Auditorium Theatre, Rochester, N.Y. Available by mail from S and B Productions, 112 Sparling Drive, Rochester, N.Y. 14616. Postpaid price not supplied.**

About one third of the back cover jacket notes are devoted to telling us how "refreshing" is many talented Rob Calcatterra. Totally unnecessary; his music states it most effectively. We've been hearing about a fantastic organist who has literally "burst" upon the concert scene in the eastern USA, mostly from charmed concert-goers who are still very much under Rob Calcatterra's spell. It can't be denied that his



record of accomplishments is remarkable (he became a piano teacher at 10!). Music is not his whole existence. For example, he's apt to show up in Europe during the summer as a tour guide; he speaks seven languages and he's only 24. Here, we'll concentrate on his musical acumen, and it is considerable. He is inventive and offers a fresh approach to some tunes while sticking to the notation in other cases. His technique is flawless and he also has a mischievous flair which could get him into trouble with those who don't appreciate having their standard favorites tampered with. He has an analytical musical ear which tends to match up musical phrases which may fit together in a snug but often illicit relationship. For example, Rob notes that a certain phrase of the "Poet and Peasant Overture" provides a wonderful springboard for a few measures of "Chopsticks," the kind of temptation which has tempted many performers (this reviewer recalls vividly how nicely the first lines of "Entry of the Gladiators" and "Ach Du Lieber Augustin" fit so many "fill" requirements). Does Rob resist the urge? He does not. Bits of unrelated tunes are jammed into at least five of his ten selections. It's a trick which will appeal to the same type of concert goer who thrills at the sight of Hector Olivera thumping out "Bumblebee" as a pedal solo. But does this sort of thing improve the music?

Actually, Rob doesn't need any gimmicks. His performance is tops without them. This disc deserves detailed examination.

"On a Wonderful Day Like Today" is Rob's console riser. It is played energetically and cleanly until the final measures when it seems his hands get out of sync and he lumbers through a sequence akin to putting two record player styli in the same groove about an inch apart. Rob calls that "double stuff" but the distant microphone placement runs it into a blur. Rob also manages to sneak in a hint of "Yankee Doodle" for reasons not explained. "By the Light of the Silvery Moon" has lots of old-fashioned charm plus a sort of counter melody fashioned from "Dark Town Strutter's Ball." Rob fits them together with easy expertise. The over-all arrangement is a beauty, with open harmony contrasting with Posthorn punctuation. "Dainty Miss" by Barnes is played



Rob Calcaterra.

(Bill Lamb Photo)

by the book. It's a charming old-fashioned little rhythm novelty somewhat reminiscent of "Polly." Rob uses thin treble solo registration with good effect here. The Glockenspiel has some comments, too.

Rob has a finger technique which make chromatics very easy for him. And when he links two far apart notes from "The Desert Song" on the Tibia, it seems almost like a slide whistle, so completely does his digital skill eliminate the distinctive pitches of keys. There is some nice open harmony in this one.

For "Sweet Georgia Brown," Rob does a nice jazz bit, sometimes a small combo, sometimes a flute solo. His insert for "Georgia" is "Up a Lazy River." They fit together well. The wolf whistle effect, sirens and bird tweets at the end are superfluous.


One quality of Rob's playing which will help endear him to theatre organ traditionalists is his use of string-heavy combinations for accompaniment and his occasional melodies topped with the Orchestral Bells, a practice frowned on by many current generation pop organists who use the percussors only for color "plinks." Rob does this too but offers an occasional phrase played on bells with gusto and panache. Sounds good as heard in "Jealousy" (sic). It's a fine rendition which features the organ's 4' Tibia and emphasis brass. Then there's more of the "double stuff" muddiness to mar the normally bright final chorus.

Rob shoots the works for "Stars and Stripes Forever," taking a few liberties with the first Trio but playing the second Trio twice to punch the Piccolo obligato. It's a thriller.

The inclusion of Walter Donaldson's "My Buddy" in the score of the mid-'20s *The Big Parade* film gave the impression that this wonderful slice of 1922 sentiment was a World War I ballad. It wasn't but it should have been. Rob's setting includes effective allusions to "When Johnny Comes Marching Home" and a low-keyed "Over There" fragment. Despite a couple of basic melody errors (or are they "variations?") this is the best rendition of "My Buddy" on organ records yet from where we listen, especially the open harmony chorus.

George Gershwin's "Swanee" is a proper vehicle for Rob Calcaterra. He is very adept with show tunes. His presentation offers a variety of registration, including a brief interval with one of Rob's favorite devices, a music box effect played on the pitched percussors. Rob likes to color his tunes with settings and this scene is set with a reference to "Swanee River." Toward the con-

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clusion there is an unexplained representation of a locomotive starting, which is at least brief and more musical than most. Never a dull moment.

The closer is a well-orchestrated version of Von Suppe's "Poet and Peasant Overture," with all the contrasts in volume, speed and intensity one expects from such a fine and familiar chestnut. Again the percussions come in unexpected places, but are handled with propriety and skill. It's a virtuoso conclusion to a first recording by an organist we'll be hearing from frequently in the future, especially after he gets his priorities sorted.

The Rochester Theatre Organ Society's 4/22 Wurlitzer in the Auditorium Theatre has been documented previously in these pages. It was in excellent condition for this album, thanks to credited technicians Fred Parker and Ron Buhlman.

The miking is in "big hall" perspective, in contrast to the "up close" technique. This gives the lis-

tener the feeling of sitting back in the auditorium, a system which favors full registrations but is apt to diminish solo voices and softer sounds. For example, the Piccolo frippery in "Stars and Stripes" is so far off-mike that it is heard at rather low volume — as though the musician forgot to come forward for his solo. Also, fast heavy passages are apt to be garbled through natural hall reverberation. Normally, the Auditorium Theatre's acoustic qualities are excellent, but Rob's "double stuff" is just too much. Confusion!

Rob leads the jacket note author a merry chase with his ever-changing registration, but the notes are generally okay. The record surface is smooth and pop-free, although the review pressing was received slightly warped but not enough to throw the stylus to the next groove.

This album is both exasperating and rewarding at the same time. We have a sneaking suspicion that it's the start of something good. □

Leibert opened the 6200-seat Radio City Music Hall, thereby becoming the only organist to have opened the two largest theatres in America.

He served at the Music Hall and nearby Center Theatre for 10 years. A demonstrator for the Hammond Corp., he performed at the 1939-40 World's Fair, and in the fifties demonstrated for Baldwin Organ Co., played swank weddings and parties, and appeared for the United Nations in its formal affairs.

A well known story teller as well as a world renowned organist, Dr. Parmentier was named Theatre Organist of the Year 1973 and entered in the Hall of Fame that year. He concertized before the 1976 ATOS Convention at the Trenton War Memorial.

Dr. Parmentier, whose biography appeared in the summer 1966 THEATRE ORGAN, was interred in Rhode Island. He is survived by his wife and a son.

**Theron G. Forbes**, 72, organist and retired school teacher, died on January 23, 1981 in Dunkirk, NY.

A native of Chicago, "Tucker" Forbes was graduated from the Eastman School of Music's theatre organ course in the same class with Rosa Rio and the late Harold Jolles. He also played the Euphonium.

Forbes followed organists Eddie Weaver and the late Dick Betts into the Lafayette Theatre in Batavia, NY. Also a graduate of Freedonia

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## ❧ Closing Chord ❧

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**Dr. C.A.J. "Cass" Parmentier**, Hall of Famer, and a leading theatre organist during the Great Era in the New York City area, died of a painful bout with cancer on February 21, 1981.

Born in Belgium before World War I, he studied under prominent teachers, and concertized in England, the Netherlands and Belgium. Arriving in the United States in 1916, he became organist for Loew's Theatres, working 8½ hours a day, seven days a week, and "loving every minute."

Married in 1918, he played Fox theatres in Paterson, N.J., New York City, and Philadelphia. In 1922, he was organist at New York's famed Capitol, and a year later was in Philadelphia to open the Fox Theatre there. For four years, he opened theatres in Detroit and New York.

On March 11, 1927, he was one of three organists to open the 6214-seat Roxy in New York, where he stayed for a number of years. He also had engagements on organs in the Welte-Mignon Studio, Wanamaker Audi-

torium, Town Hall, Carnegie Hall, Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, and others. In 1932, he began his broadcasting career, by subbing for Ann Leaf on CBS. In December 1932, he and Dick



Dr. C.A.J. "Cass" Parmentier at the Radio City Music Hall, 1974.