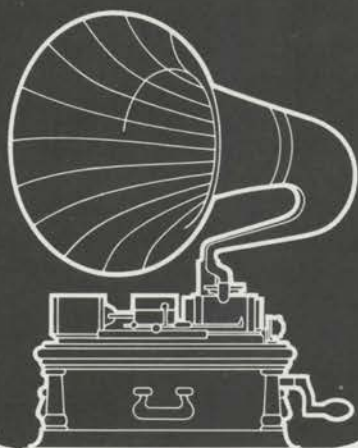


For The Records



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GARY KONAS — ON BROADWAY. SEVEN DECADES OF SHOW MUSIC, played on the 4/21 Wurlitzer in Grant Union High School, Sacramento, Calif. Enophile No. 001 (stereo). \$8.50 postpaid from Gary Konas, 1125 H Street, No. 7, Davis, Calif. 95616.

If the name Gary Konas seems vaguely familiar to readers, it may be due to the articles he has written for this publication, one on the nation's organ-equipped pizzerias being current. Gary has been an organ enthusiast since hearing early George Wright records, followed by lessons with Col. Harry Jenkins, and more recently with Bill Thomson. Otherwise, he is mostly self-taught. Like many organists in that category, his approach to music is somewhat different than that of the academically-trained organist. In his case, and with the advantage of an accurate ear for music, Gary's skills are pleasingly presented.

"Rise 'n Shine" (Vincent Youmans) is a typical upbeat console riser played with plenty of verve, some bombast, some sentiment.

"What I Did for Love" features a fine solo reed, an Oboe Horn if we're not mistaken, during the first chorus of this appealing *Chorus Line* ballad. And who can resist "Mame," with her non-conformist charm? Gary's arrangement is characteristically comic and offbeat, with even a stop-time tap dance sequence. "Mame" also sets some sort of record for key changes — six, in all. "Till There Was You" is one of the most haunting love songs from the U.S. music theatre. Again it's that solo reed but the instrument's excellent Tibias make their romantic statements, too, in this very special Konas arrangement. "Come Follow the Band" reproduces the band's second act entry in *Barnum* wherein the musicians enter from the back and march down the aisles, adding their parts in sequence. Gary Konas has had the advantage of seeing most of the stage shows represented by the music offered here, and injects the color of his personal experiences accordingly.

Side Two is dominated by seven selections from *Oklahoma*, obviously a Konas favorite, judging from the loving care he takes with the arrangements and carefully selected registration. He has some fun with "Kansas City," is appropriately romantic during "People Will Say We're in Love," and kittenish for "I Can't Say No." The lovely "Out of My Dreams" is presented as a slow waltz, rather than as in the sometimes chilling ballet sequence of the show. The closer is a big and full reading of the title tune.

The closing set is a tribute to pianist-composer Eubie Blake and organist-composer Fats Waller, with a bouncing "I'm Just Wild About Harry" and "Ain't Misbehavin'," which they wrote, respectively. In the latter, Gary comes close to the Waller style, even to the sometimes garish (over-mutated) registration Fats used for novelty effects.

The tunes are carefully and sensitively orchestrated and performed, adding up to a much better than usual first recording. Yet Gary doesn't tamper with the tunesmith's intent. The organ, which was largely masterminded by George Wright when he was a student at Grant High School, makes its power felt. If not enough of the solo reeds are heard, it's because some were in need of



Gary Konas.

help at the time the material was taped. But Gary covers any registration shortages with skill; unless one is being picky, the preponderance of full combinations is not objectionable.

Jacket notes reflect the organist's love for the musical theatre. Recording is in "medium" perspective and generally good. The review copy had some distortion during a few loud passages, especially during Cut 1, Side 1, which seems to be in the pressing process and not the tape. Some biography of the organist is provided, along with photos. Gary here proves he's a comer.

CONTRAST, LEW WILLIAMS PLAYS THE WURLITZER PIPE ORGANS AT ORGAN STOP PIZZA, PHOENIX AND MESA, ARIZONA. No. OSP-106 stereo. Available in the USA for \$8.00 postpaid from the William P. Brown Organization, 5326 North Seventh Street, Phoenix, Arizona 85014.

Lew Williams grew up in Lafayette, Louisiana, and started playing by ear at 10. He discovered the organ in his early teens. He attended an ATOS convention in Los Angeles the year George Wright played that memorable concert at the Pasadena Rialto Theatre. Seeking Wright's counsel, Lew was advised to study piano if he planned a career as an organist. Lew's piano studies didn't start until he was 15 but he progressed rapidly. He studied organ in college at TCU in Fort Worth and upon graduation went to Switzerland for a year of study at the Conservatory of Music in Geneva. One might assume, therefore, that he would develop into a classical organist, and he has. But the theatre organ

was always his first love and the classical training does much to enhance the pop-standard selections he offers on this, his first record. He manages some very complex passages throughout the program without resorting to overdubbing.

The instruments have been discussed during previous reviews of discs by Ron Rhode and Lyn Larsen (who Lew replaced when Lyn left the Bill Brown restaurant complex). Both are very fine organs and were in top shape for the taping. Let's examine the tunelist.

Played on the 4/29 Organ Stop Pizza Wurlitzer, Phoenix: "A Fifth of Beethoven," "As Time Goes By," "String of Pearls" and a shortened "Rhapsody in Blue."

Played on the 3/23 Organ Stop Pizza Wurlitzer, Mesa: "In the Mood," "Autumn Leaves," "Plink, Plank, Plunk," "Blue Danube Waltz" and Finale from Rossini's "William Tell Overture" (listed as "The Lone Ranger").

The choice of selections is a good one, with one exception: at the risk of being classed as an old fogey, this reviewer can see no reason for reducing such a noble work as the opening of Beethoven's "5th Symphony" to a disco beat, especially when this artist is fully capable of performing it as the composer intended. At least it is over in less than three minutes. Other than that possible *faux pas*, the remainder of the program could be described as the stuff of which dreams are made.

Lew has that uncanny musical acumen and sensitive ear which enable him to analyze previously re-



Lew Williams.

corded music with amazing accuracy. Thus "String of Pearls" and "In the Mood" have all the "ride" details on the Glenn Miller records, and his registration is also as close to the originals as an organ can make them. His "Rhapsody" also shows an in-depth study of the 1920's Paul Whiteman recording which was orchestrated by Ferde Grofe. At that time all a 78 rpm disc could handle was five minutes a side, so both sides of the 12" Victor bore a 10-minute version of the more than 15-minute composition. Many a symphony orchestra has played the "Rhapsody in Blue," but none has come as close to Gershwin's "bluesy" intent as did Whiteman's comparatively small group of jazz-wise musicians. So Lew Williams chose the best interpretation to guide him. He plays about the same ten minutes Whiteman did. His re-creation of the Grofe orchestration is superb, much more realistic than the Michael Til-

son Thomas attempt with full orchestra.

But re-creating classic recordings is only a small part of Lew's abilities. Entirely original treatments are afforded two standard ballads, "As Time Goes By" and "Autumn Leaves" (with an interpolation of "Lullaby of the Leaves"). Our previous term, "dream stuff," applies.

A lesser-known novelty by Leroy Anderson, "Plink, Plank, Plunk," provides an opportunity for Lew to play some silent movie comedy music, and for the benefit of trap-happy pizza munchers he goes through the toy counter for comedic punctuation.

One of Lew's strong points is good phrasing. This ability is felt throughout the waxing, but is especially important during "Blue Danube Waltz." Lew plays it all, and after the atmospheric intro the characteristic "boom-trap-trap" starts. This can add up to monotony unless the organist devises ways to minimize it. Lew does it with sensitive phrasing. Johann Jr. would be pleased with the result.

The closer is that old reliable pizza audience show stopper, "The Lone Ranger." Heigh-ho Silver, Awaaaaay!

The disc is housed in a deluxe book album with photos of both pizzeria interiors and fine color shots of Lew at both consoles. Plenty of notes inform us about the locations, instruments, organist and music.

Wade Bray's recording is tops, using commercial equipment plus a mixer he built. The production is first class all the way. □

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