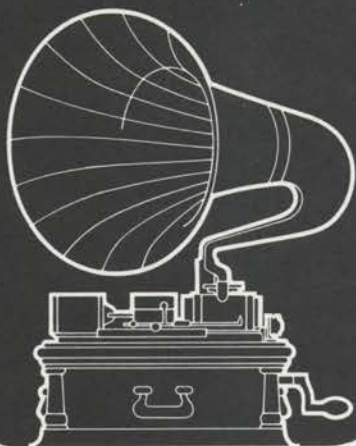


For The Records



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.

THE ROAD TO WICHITA. Billy Nalle Plays the Wichita Wurlitzer. \$8.50 postpaid from Central Ticket Agency, 225 West Douglas, Wichita, Kansas 67202, or (autographed) from Billy Nalle Music, Suite 2205, 400 West Central Ave., Wichita, Kansas 67203.

Although several records by famed organists have been played on the 4/37 (probably 4/38 by now) ex-Dowager Empress, this is the second album released by Wichita Theatre Organ, Inc., owners and caretakers of the one-time Times Square Paramount organ. Both times they have selected their resident organist, Billy Nalle. This album provides good examples of why they prefer their own man. Billy can't be classified in any of the standard niches. His is a universal art. He here plays theatre style, concert, jazz improvisation, swingband and even finely sifted schmaltz.

The release is appropriately dedicated to the memory of the late Richard C. Simonton, one of ATOS' founders, who was instrumental in the Wichita club's purchase of the

famed instrument.

Here are the selections:

"Just One of Those Things" is a curtain raiser full of surprises for the discriminating aficionado who likes to analyze arrangements. Changes in registration, unusual harmonic treatment and a driving tempo provide a bright and colorful palette for this vintage Cole Porter tune.

"I Need to be in Love" is an understated and romantic treatment of a recent pop tune. Thin registration and solo voices are featured during the first chorus.

The jacket notes tell us that Grieg's "To Spring" was the first piece Billy learned as an eight-year-old piano student. Here Billy brings out its subtle statements on conservative registration.

Words are hardly adequate to express what Billy does to and with "I Got Rhythm." He starts out simply enough, then all hell breaks loose. The tempo goes wild and there are poly-rhythmic inserts. The harmonic conceptions are as vivacious as the tempo. Leaves one breathless and short of proper adjectives.

Billy plays "When You're Away" in a rarified atmosphere which tells of long ago when life was simpler. It's an arrangement which would please Victor Herbert who wrote it in the early years of this century. Unsophisticated and lovely.

Billy's arrangement of "Marie" may be indicative of his growth as a musician since he recorded it for his first platter, *Swingin' Pipe Organ* (played on this same organ when it was in the Times Square Paramount). For his 1957 arrangement Billy stuck rather closely to the Tommy Dorsey recorded version, which had inspired the revival of the tune in the late '30s. Billy's 1981 version is completely his own. The driving rhythm is about the same but Billy's talent for harmonic invention has either developed or been freed for this recording, and he gives it free reign without destroying the nostalgic value of the oldie.

Taking advantage of the opportunity to plug his own music, Billy plays his novelty tune "Tom, Tom the Piper's Son." It's a rhythmic ditty with a touch of counterpoint, a proper walking theme for a simplistic silent movie comic — Harry Langdon or Larry Semon, perhaps, but with charm.



Billy Nalle.

(Pearce Photo)

The words to "Road to Mandalay" are adapted from a poem by Rudyard Kipling:

*By the old Moulmein Pagoda,
lookin' eastward to the sea,
There's a Burma girl a-settin',
an' I know she thinks of me;
For the wind is in the palm trees,
and the temple bells they say:
"Come you back, you British
soldier;
come you back to Mandalay!"*

This excerpt will establish the mood of an unfinished love story. Little if any of the mood of this barracks ballad is reflected in the Nalle presentation. Rather, he uses it as a framework to display one of his enormous talents — improvisation.

So don't expect to be shipped "somewhere east of Suez where the best is like the worst, where there aren't no Ten Commandments, and a man can raise a thirst." Instead get set for some of the most intriguing jazz variations since Fats Waller. Sometimes Billy strays far from "where the old flotilla lay" in this masterwork of turning, twisting and working all around the fringes of an established tune. But if one can forget Kipling the rewards are great. This time it's over seven minutes of the mighty Wurlitzer comin' up like thunder, piloted by an expert.

For the next 8 minutes and 47 seconds we have nothing but praise. It's a beautifully-phrased conception of "This Nearly Was Mine" (*South Pacific*). It's played as a tender ballad with just the right interplay

among subtle organ voices. In one spot the music is carried on a mass of strings, the closest we've yet heard an organ come to a Dave Rose string section (remember "Our Waltz"?). The total effect is not unlike being made love to by a favorite sweetheart. When Billy has finished this selection, there's just nothing more to say.

It's a variety program throughout, with no dull moments but some mind-boggling. If Billy's complex orchestration seems to get too busy in one selection, the next tune will be entirely different, and the following one will contrast with both. We feel this album represents Billy at his most effective in the areas covered here.

Recording is good, with plenty of big hall perspective but never to the point of blurring. The review pressing was tops too. Jacket notes about the music are happily "unsquare," although written by a college liturgical music professor. The color cover photo shows the organ console and Billy is also pictured. Best of all the detailed organ stoplist is printed. There are a couple of printing errors, but nothing serious.

It's a first class production from any viewpoint.

PAGE WON, played by Hector Olivera on the 4/15 Page organ in the Embassy Theatre, Fort Wayne, Indiana. \$9.75 postpaid from the Embassy Theatre Foundation, Box 11266, Fort Wayne, Ind. 46856.

Most readers are aware of the Embassy Theatre Foundation's rescue of the entire theatre building, a project which started with a group organized to save only the organ, a novel and encouraging variation on the usual turn of events. Several recordings have been made on the 4/15 Page organ, and this is perhaps the most ambitious to date. The instrument is probably the most representative example of its brand remaining in a theatre. It's original excellence is further enhanced by much TLC in the form of maintenance by organwise Foundation members. The acoustic qualities of the 3100-seat house add much to the tonal setting. By now organ fans are well informed about the artistry of Argentinian émigré Hector Olivera, who came to the USA, a nearly penniless youth with an overpowering



Hector Olivera.

ability on the classical organ. Then he discovered the theatre organ and has been rating applause for his theatre organ concerts ever since. This recording is representative of the considerable Olivera musical skills. Let's examine his treatment of each selection on the varied tunelist.

"Bob Sled" is the typical speedy "Roller Coaster"-style console upper. Lots of brass punctuation and full organ plus much energy. Unable to find the notation, Hector transcribed the tune from a recording.

"Romanza" is a lovely low-key rendition of a ballad-style tune by organist Richard Purvis. Sometimes reminiscent of "Out of Nowhere," the tune and treatment exude a tranquil charm.

"Oye Negra," in contrast, is a study in "El Cumbanchero"-style

bombast, a flamboyant South American adventure played with great flair, speed, gusto and brass.

How would Buddy Cole have played "Hey There"? mused Hector. He makes a valiant stab at an elusive style, one which duplicates the mechanics of a Cole conception but waxes a bit raunchy during the interplay between soft melodic "question" registration and the brassy "answers." He rates an "A" for his accurate ear in absorbing the essentials of the style, but only a "C" for the sometimes unsubtle execution of it. Probably only those familiar with the real Cole musicality will notice it, so we may be jousting with pinwheels.

"Don't Cry for Me, Argentina" did much to further the plot of the stage presentation of *Evita*. But without the support of the stage action and settings, alone it sounds much like a hymn. Hector makes the most of weak material with tasteful understatement. The Page Vox Humana solos briefly; it has a distinctly male timbre.

Hector plays Schubert's "March Militaire" by the book on mostly untrem'd voices, for a straight organ effect. Lots of Brass.

"Ice Castles," which Hector has fitted with an "Ave Maria" intro, employs a technique used by such showmen-classical organists as Edwin LeMare, who, 70 years ago, wowed audiences by using four manuals simultaneously. Playing on manuals 2 and 4, Hector "thumbs

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down" counter melodies and harp plinks on manuals 1 and 3. Otherwise its a low key rendition of a recent pop. The "Ave Maria" effect closes the tune.

"The Continental" briefly solos a bright untrem'd brass voice. It's a fast, flashy and rhythmic interpretation of the forgotten dance made briefly popular by Fred and Ginger back in the '30s.

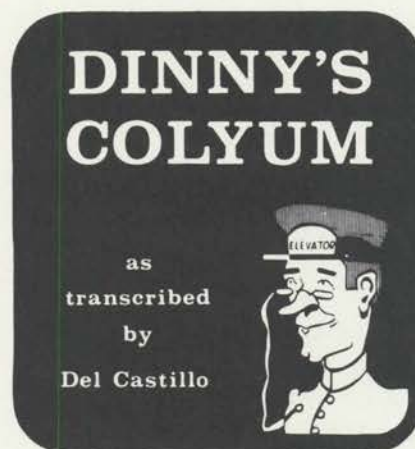
There's always one goodie in an album which seems to shine more brightly than the others. Such a selection is Hoagy ("Stardust") Carmichael's "One Morning in May," an exquisite tune to start with. A few titles back, we weren't overly enthusiastic about Hector's application of Buddy Cole effects. He more than makes up for any previous shortcomings with this selection, which is admittedly inspired by a Cole recording. Hector has expertly recreated the mood, nuance, registration and phrasing of the original. As for registration, Hector does it with 15 ranks (Cole had 26). The musical acumen with which Hector reproduces the elements of this arrangement, with its unique harmonies and offbeat tonal structures, suggests the possibility of an *Olivera Plays Cole* album.

"Exodus" is the title music of the remembered film. It's played mostly in bravura style with lots of untrem'd full organ. There are quieter moments of exposition which build interest but the main emphasis seems to be on the crescendo pedal. Yet, it provides an appropriate *grande finale*.

This recording has a wide dynamic range to accommodate Hector's penchant for alternating a very soft combination with full organ. We caught just a smidgeon of distortion on some of the loud passages, but not enough to mar the music. Jacket notes include a brief history of the theatre and some biography of the organist. Hector wrote the notes about the music. There are a few minor printing typos, but no meanings are affected. The jacket bears a striking color photo of the Embassy auditorium with the console up and spotlighted. Profits realized from the sale of this album are spent on organ maintenance and improvement. Imaginative playing and a fine instrument, well-recorded, add up to a worthwhile package. □

Doric Discontinues Discs

THEATRE ORGAN has received confirmation from Dick Penberthy, of Doric Records, that the firm has discontinued production of records. The stock on hand has been turned over to the Organ Literature Foundation, 45 Norfolk Road, Braintree, Massachusetts 02184. Doric will continue to offer recordings in the open reel and cassette formats, but there will be no new pressings of current discs. Doric's address is P.O. Box 877, Vacaville, California 95696. □



Musta been back in the '20s when I begun to pay attenshun to the organ playin in the movies. Thats a dead givaway on account of that was over fitty years ago and that makes me a pretty old geezer. But anyways nobody could halp noticin the organ player because plum in the middle of the show up they come on a elyvator to play a solo in the spotlight and then when they finish they go back down into the seller slick as grease and maybe that is why I notice them on account of I am a elyvator man myself. And of course that aint really nothin for them days because they was these De Looks theayters with big simpany orchestras and the whole kit and kaboodle of all 80 of them would come up on a elyvator that took up the whole orchestra pit.

Of course they was all kinds of organists that did different kinds of solos. They was Jessie Crawford who they called the Poet of the organ who did mostly classical songs and ballads like and then they was organists like Henry Murtagh or C Sharp Minor who rote up there own jingles like and put them on steryoptican slides, and then they was singin organists like Milton Charles who give out with the pipes and I dont mean

the organ pipes. They all had to think up ideas that would go over good with the audience and they was helped out by companies that made up Original Slide Novelties that they sold to the organists and then they was the pop music publishers from Tin Pan Alley who saw theirselves a chance to get into the act by puttin out illustrated slides with the words of the pop hits they wanted to sell. So of course that led up to the Songalog as they called it when the audience was suppose to join in.

So then somebody gets the idea that if one organ is goin to be popular why two organs is goin to be twicet as popular and pretty soon they get three organs goin at the new Roxy Theayter in New York City but that was too much so mostly they cut down to two organs at both ends of the orchetry pit. I remember they was one time in a theayter in Boston durin the summer when a organ duet was announce on the screen and the number one organist dint show up so the number two organist run acrost the pit and punches the button to take the organ up into the spotlight on account the organ he was on dint have any elevator and while he was playin the number one organ player staggers in late and opens the door into the pit but the organ had already gone up and he falls into the pit in his white summer suit and gets all covered over with black grease to say nothin of gettin fired but two weeks later he gets his job back because the manager says he would rather have him drunk than any other organist sober. Now dont get to thinkin that was Mr. Crawford who not only dint drink but had his wife playin the second organ and besides like I said he dint go in for the trick stuff so much.

One of the stunts the organists use to do was to put a singer or a violin or a sax player up in the organ chambers and pretend it was a organ stop. But mostly they would have singers or players or like that there come out and perform on the stage or at the side of the organ. One organ player did a solo on School Days and had three little girl singers perched on the top of the organ. Then they was a gal organ player who had a organ record hid up in the organ chambers that she could start, so when it started she got up and left the organ and it went on playin like she was still adoin it. Oncet Mr. Murtagh fell into the