

thing major takes place inside, the building must be re-roofed and one of the air conditioning systems replaced. We will soon get practice in applying for grants and trying for other sources of funds to do all these projects. Already we have received many donations in the form of labor and supplies.

On July 1 our opening movie was *Dr. Zhivago*. The theatre is being operated as a specialty house, with a wide variety of films: second-run contemporary movies, major foreign films, vintage musicals, children's matinees, etc., and several silent movie nights a year. Open seven days a week, the admission is \$2.50 for adults, and \$1.50 for senior citizens and children. Organ music is provided before the weekend movies.

A brochure is being printed now to interest businesses in renting our facilities, to acquaint area schools with programs aimed at students, and to offer tours of the building. At the end of September, the North Dakota Chapter of the American Institute of Architects held their annual convention in Fargo. One of their meetings took place at the theatre, where Steve Johnson tied in the theme of the convention, "Downtown Again," with the work of Jack Liebenberg and the planned restoration of the theatre.

Public awareness and support has been good thus far, because of extensive newspaper and television coverage. We look forward to continued support and a bright future for the Fargo Theatre. □



Jonas Nordwall.

(Claude Neuffer photo)

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.

BITS, BYTES AND PIPES. Jonas Nordwall playing the 4/44 composite Wurlitzer in Portland's Organ Grinder Restaurant. No. JN-108. \$12.00 (\$17.50 in UK) postpaid from Dennis Hedberg, 1303 SW 16th Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97201.

We have kept an eye (and ears) on Jonas Nordwall since he was about 16 when he played a session on a Rodgers organ for a group of ATOSers at a Portland-based conclave back in the '60s. He was a remarkable musician then and the years have only sharpened his musical acumen and ability. His music has never let us down.

Before going into the content, a word about the recording method. This is a digital recording, which to some will mean only that it costs more. To others, pulse code modulation recording means a frequency range nearly flat from 0 to well over 20,000 Hertz, a dynamic range to 90 decibels and distortion measuring in the bottom hundredths of one percent. Sounds just about perfect, doesn't it? And well it may be — if you also have digital playback facilities.

ties. We don't.

On our set (and those of two audio-minded neighbors) the music sounded fine but not different from records made in the conventional way. Also, there was one negative aspect; that 90 db dynamic range was too much for all three of the sets used to test it. On very loud passages there was distortion and a very nervous stylus which sounded very much like over-modulation. The releasers anticipated this and assured us it wasn't so in the jacket notes, suggesting increased stylus pressure. It worked but in our experience increased stylus pressure has also increased record wear. So much for the current state of the art. Now to the selections.

Jonas' "Jealousy" (sic) is often reminiscent of the 1950's George Wright recording but it's the first version we've heard which we feel could be classed as a successor to that arrangement and performance.

"Bailey Gatzert March" (1902) is descriptive of a Columbia River steamboat according to the jacket notes. Like so many of its genre, the "description" is all in the accompanying notes; it's a typical newsreel march given a slambang performance by Jonas, with lots of Glockenspiel and traps.

"Pomp and Circumstance No. 4" is not the over-ripe "Land of Hope and Glory" but another in the series of five coronation marches written by Elgar. It is far more majestic than the more familiar "No. 1," especially when Jonas brings the four 32' and fourteen 16 footers to the pedals. A real spine tingler!

"Eye of the Tiger" tries to make the theatre organ register rock music. The hard-driving automatic traps help, but whether a 44-rank organ is a proper vehicle for rock is something the listener will have to decide.

From rock to operetta demonstrates the range of Jonas Nordwall's versatility. His "Indian Love Call" draws on just the right organ voices to make it a precious moment from a long ago show (*Rose Marie*), one which couldn't fail to delight its chief exponent, the late vocalist Nelson Eddy decked out as the ultimate "Mountie."

Side 2 opens with a mostly bur-nished brass-registered "New York, New York" the first time through. Then it's big organ combinations

punctuated with traps. Lots of energy here.

"Memory" is a subtle exploration of the organ's solo voices and ballad combinations via a lovely melody. It builds and builds in emotional content to a climax followed by a "voxie" coda (the organ has seven voxes).

Smetana's "Dance of the Comedians" is an old warhorse often favored by spotlight soloists during the "Golden Era," mainly because it moves quickly and melodically while cramming a lot of interest into a few rhythmic moments. It also has the required slow middle section but it's the often-polyphonic bombast which holds attention. Jonas does it proud!

Scott Joplin's music is always refreshing. Its pleasant rhythmic lilt and colors, reminiscent of another era, are affectionately registered by Jonas with the aid of some of the organ's percussers. "Elite Syncopation" is easy listening.

The closer is a very mellow rendition of Cole Porter's "In the Still of the Night." It's a well-conceived arrangement which solos massed strings, adds Tibia embellishment and uses brass reeds to carry contrasting counter melodies. It's played as a ballad but often in strict but easy rhythm.

The instrument is worthy of special comment. It started life as a 3/13 Wurlitzer in Portland's Oriental Theatre. What happened after the Oriental was threatened is largely traceable to Dennis Hedberg, who also produced this album. Dennis is one of those people gifted with pipe organ know-how, a keen sense of business and the ability to plan. Dennis gathered some associates (including Jonas) and they laid plans for a super pizzeria with pipes in Portland, starting with the Oriental's 3/13 as a nucleus. The building went up rapidly and the enlarged organ was ready for the 1973 ATOS convention.

The organ has been growing ever since and is now up to 44 ranks controlled by the former Boston Metropolitan Theatre's 4-manual console. The emphasis here is on excellence. Dennis Hedberg, being a perfectionist, sees to it that the huge instrument is always in top shape, which may be one facet in the Organ Grinder's success story. Another factor is the high quality of musicianship offered, here represented by Jonas Nordwall. None

of his selections sound like "pizza music." It's all concert quality.

The music is well recorded (for that much bread it had better be!) although the review pressing had more surface noise in places than one might anticipate. The jacket boasts a fine color photo of the glass-encased chambers and console. A photo of Jonas graces the back of the jacket. The jacket notes are well-conceived and informative. It's a good package and will get even better when we can afford a digital playback.

CHRIS ELLIOTT PLAYS THE SIMONTON WURLITZER PIPE ORGAN. Christell No. CPE-101. \$9.00 (Californians add 6 percent sales tax) plus \$1.25 postage and handling from Christell Productions, P.O. Box 11571, Santa Ana, California 92711.

It always is a pleasure to welcome young artists to the recording fold, especially those who show much promise. Such a youth is Chris Elliott (he can still look forward to his 20th birthday). We have been watching the southern California native since he was 15. At that time he played a sort of "test concert" before an invited audience on the Bob Trousdale residence pipe organ, and Chris invited some tough critics. His professionalism and enthusiasm displayed during that concert marked him as a talent to watch. Since then Chris has been playing concert engagements for organ clubs across the land. Those who attended the Detroit ATOS convention last year will recall his duet with Lyn Larsen.

We sometimes take potshots at young musicians we feel record before they are ready. We can state that, despite his youth, Chris Elliott is ready! He produced this album pretty much on his own, and his first concern was for quality, be it the music, the pressings, the transfer from tape to disc, the mailers, the costly inner jackets, or the instrument.

The instrument. Thereby hangs a tale too long to relate here. In brief, it's the 4/36 assembled residence Wurlitzer which was the pride and joy of the late Richard C. Simonton. Previous efforts to record it haven't brought out the full range of sounds it produces for the "in person" listener. For one thing, the 36 ranks of pipes are crammed into a space the size of a

two-car garage; the listening area (the Bijou Theatre) is oblong and the ceiling is not high enough to fully accommodate 36 ranks. Yet it is a remarkably fine-sounding organ, especially in view of recent tonal regulation and trem adjustments done by some of the best talent available, including Ron Mitchell and Lyn Larsen. Roy Casavant, Steve Ross and organist Gordon Kibbee helped, too. Helena Simonton (Dick's widow) wanted to get the organ in the best shape possible. Judging from the sound on this disc, she will be pleased. Now to the music.

"California Here I Come" includes the rarely heard verse. It's a tribute to Chris's home state in upbeat tempo and with numerous registration changes.

"Nocturne." Composer Gaylord Carter wrote it "on standby" in 1940 while waiting at NBC Hollywood for radio transmission lines to fail. It's a quiet piece suitable for a romantic movie sequence. Chris uses very conservative registration here, which is in keeping with the composer's intent. The Brass Trumpet is prominent.

"Jack in the Box" is a typical Zez Confrey novelty tune with the usual staccato and legato sections. The Posthorn is used in the traditional way, as end-of-phrase emphasis.

"With a Song in My Heart" is Chris's finest balladry. He milks this tender tune for all it's worth in both expression and registration. It ends in a monumental climax followed by a soft and brief coda.

"I Found a Million Dollar Baby in



Chris Elliott.

a 5 and 10 Cent Store," is one of composer Harry Warren's efforts toward easing the economic depression of the '30s (he wrote most of the tunes for those memorable Warner Bros. '30s musicals). Chris presents it in a rhythmic 1931 setting appropriate to the mood of the day — some bravado plus guarded optimism.

"Trumpet Voluntary" is not the one by Jeremiah Clarke, so long associated with the title but a spirited and often contrapuntal processional by John Stanley, a British court musician and contemporary of Handel. It makes excellent use of the organ's brass and achieves dignity without undue solemnity in this Richard Purvis arrangement.

"The Birth of Passion." In every accomplished organist's bag of tricks is mimicry, a talent for analyzing and recreating the styles of other prominent organists. During the late '20s or early '30s, Jesse Crawford revived a tune forever linked to the films' first vamp, Theda Bara. Chris has obviously studied every nuance of the Crawford treatment. His expression, phrasing and registration come very close to the original. So close in fact, that we can easily conjure up that famous film clip from *A Fool There Was* (1915) wherein a reposing Theda, resplendent in grotesque eye makeup, and fiddling with an ever-dropping shoulder strap on her seductive gown, looks at her quivering soon-to-be conquest and commands (via a subtitle) — "Kiss me, fool!"

Even to those without this recollection, it's a worthy tune, first an exercise in the use of sexy Tibias and then massed strings during the second theme followed by an intriguing, large waltz. Chris recreates it perfectly.

No debut recording would be complete without a march; Chris selected Schubert's "Marche Militaire," a genre not as easy to play as Sousa but Chris is not one to shirk a challenge. Chris provides a fine orchestral setting without reverting to booming percussions.

"Lovers Belong to Sorrento" was written by organist Lyn Larsen to commemorate an enjoyable vacation spent in Italy. It's a lovely Mediterranean-style ballad. Chris closely follows Larsen's arrangement as played on one of Lyn's records. Again the phrasing is tops and the registration fitting, with nice Tibia work.

Both composer and intrepeter get an "A."

"Bandstand Boogie" will appeal to all who have watched *American Bandstand* over the decades; it's the ageless Dick Clark's program theme. Chris gives it the full syncopated treatment and punctuates with the Pedal Cymbal throughout.

"Something's Got to Give" was written by Johnny Mercer for the 1955 Fred Astaire movie *Daddy Long Legs*. Presented here as a rhythm-ballad it recalls a time before "rock" blotted out pretty music from the entertainment media.

Composer-conductor Ralph Carmichael is best known for his religious tunes with a popular music slant (he used to arrange for and conduct Nat King Cole recording sessions). "A Quiet Place" suggests that we all need moments of reflection and contemplation. Chris Elliott (the Chris is short for Christian) is a religious person, so the Carmichael tune is a natural for him. The title describes both selection and performance. It never sounds tremors-off "churchie."

Frederick Delius is known as a classical composer of offbeat music often featuring strange and seemingly unrelated harmonies. But Chris Elliott dug deep and located a Delius tune which could have been written by Leroy Anderson — "Winter Night." It's a vivid description of a winter time sleighride, a frosty dash through crisp snow. A fitting closer.

Recording is good. Now to the touchy matter of reverb. Some listeners prefer the live "mikes in the balcony" effect, claiming it's a more theatre-like sound. Others like the closeup sound (all of Crawford's records are miked in closeup; he insisted). This record comes nearest the reverb-less studio sound. We feel it could have benefitted from just a touch of reverb. The review copy was flawless in playback, one of the smoothest we've checked.

The front of the jacket bears the same photo shown here. The back has a shot of the console, which is a duplicate of the RCMH consoles. There are three columns of jacket notes about Chris, the music and the organ. It's a first class package from all angles, we say.

THEATRE ORGAN WANT ADS
GET QUICK RESULTS!



the halloween corner

CHAPELLE DES MORTS (Music from Your Darkest Dreams). John Rose playing 140- and 78-rank Austin organs. No. T1007. Available in record stores or from Towerhill Records, 6000 Sunset Boulevard, Hollywood, California 90028. \$8.98 (plus \$1.50 postage and handling).

Just before Halloween each year, record counters abound with albums of ghostly tales read by Karloff, Lugosi and Vincent Price, among others. Also available are records of sound effects — grunts, groans, rattling chains, etc.

But it was left to Towerhill Records' Michael Nemo to conjure up a record of classical selections appropriate to All Saints' Eve with the sound effects already implanted.

Organist John Rose is no stranger to readers of these pages. Probably his most memorable album was his *Star Wars* score excerpts played on the 140-rank Austin organ in the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Hartford, Connecticut. The same massive Austin is heard on this album. And one selection ("A Night on Bald Mountain") is played on Hartford's Trinity College Chapel 78-rank Austin. Both installations exude majesty and grandeur. Once more Robert Edward Smith is the arranger (we wonder how he scored for thunderclaps and bat wings). He also plays the harpsichord for some tunes.

As always with the work of this crew (Nemo, Rose, Smith) it's often difficult to determine what their aims are. Are they serious or trying for laughs? That's something we'll allow the auditioner to ponder. No great liberties are taken with the music other than in matters of registration and expression. No Spike Jones distortions. It's concert quality perfor-

by Geoffrey Paterson

mances throughout — but those sound effects are aimed toward sensation seekers, not classical music lovers! As we stated, we can't determine which way they're looking. So we'll consider this platter to be just clean fun. Let's examine the selections.

"Toccatà in D Minor" (Bach) opens with Halloween sound effects (thunder, a tolling bell, footsteps with echo, then a door slam). Then a good but not Stokowski-ish reading of the "Toccatà" followed by rolling thunder.

"Gnomes" (Mussorgsky) solos a stumbling and contrapuntal harpsichord. It's weird.

"The Goblin" (Couperin) opens with an unintelligible conversation between what could be a couple of *Jedi* "Ewoks." Then the rather formal harpsichord-dominated Goblin music, followed by tiny footsteps running. Or maybe wings flapping. (The ground fog is thick.)

"Gargoyles" (Vierne) is slow, sulen and grimly atmospheric, played mostly on gruff reeds. It includes a bridge of flapping wings and a bat fight. "Kyrie" (also Vierne) isn't quite so grotesque as "Gargoyles" but it fits the sepulchral scene very well. It includes a minute of mumbles and beast roars. Lots of big cathedral organ climaxes in the César Franck tradition.

Side 2 opens with 1:33 minutes of chattering and grunting sounds labelled "Motley's Maggot." No music is involved, just ghostly noises.

"Venomous Obstacles" is a harpsichord solo. It is a composition of Satie, a French composer known for his often strange music. It's a good choice. To compound the unearthly effect, the tune ends in a scream.

The closer is 14:36 minutes of Mussorgsky's "A Night on Bald Mountain" with both organ and harpsichord. It is easily the strangest and most shocking "Bald Mountain" on records, with sudden heavy organ "stings" which contrast with surrounding low level passages. Rose sometimes emphasizes harmony lines normally blended into the whole.

This version has little in common with the "Mountain" heard in Disney's *Fantasia*, although it would fit the graphics just as well — once we got used to it.

The orchestrator missed one notable sound cue — the crowing of the



John Rose.

cock at dawn as the roistering skeletons scuttle back to their graves. Just think, they could have inserted a Rhamphorhynchus scream! Instead — nothing. But that lack probably improves the music quality.

There isn't much more we can add about the music. Is it merely a crutch for monstrous sound effects, or vice versa? This one's a puzzler and we detect several cheeks bulging with tongue.

The organs are of the "romantic" church organ persuasion, with big Diapason choruses, magnificent solo reeds and mighty pedal voices. It's the straight organ sound throughout with no attempt toward theatrical sounds. For that matter, we don't think Messrs Rose and Nemo are aware of the theatre organ.

The recording (by Michael Nemo) overcomes the five million cubic feet of echo chamber which is the Cathedral of St. Joseph. Both organs are well recorded. The review pressing was smooth and free of warp. The back of the jacket bears adequate notes.

If you would like to hear a program of ghostly classical selections played on straight organ and harpsichord (plus sound effects) on Halloween, this may be for you. □

SHOWTIME AT THE DETROIT FOX. Don Thompson at the 4/36 Wurlitzer, Fox Theatre, Detroit. Pipe Organ Presentations WRC1-2134. Available from Pipe Organ Presentations, 3678 Arcadian Drive, Castro Valley, California 94546. \$8.99 post-paid.

It has been a long time since an album was released which accurately captured the big theatre sound of a Wurlitzer 4/36 Special. Longer still since a release played on the Detroit Fox organ, one of the two still remaining. (It is one of fate's quirks that the two remaining *in situ* are in the identical Fox Theatres of Detroit and St. Louis.) While there have been albums of the transplanted New York Paramount organ, they simply don't have that rich, resonant room sound despite the fact that the organ itself is almost beyond compare.

Several companies have tried to capture the sound of the Detroit Fox in the past. Back in the fifties Emery Cook made an attempt with Reginald Foort and came nowhere near the fidelity of his Richmond Mosque discs. Then Prescott tried with Ed Gress and did a lot better. Columbia recorded Raymond Shelley there in the sixties (at the suggestion of E. Power Biggs, no less) and came pretty close. But something was missing — it just wasn't the same as sitting there.

Recording in theatres has always been a tricky business, particularly because the ambience of the room itself becomes an integral part of the sonic mix. Since High Fidelity arrived, multiple miking has been the secret. It gives lots of clarity, but the balance of presence and reverb tends to be more ideal than realistic in the final product. One person in any given spot would never hear the same blend of all the different elements.

On this album, engineer Dave Burnham has used a single AKG C24 stereo microphone — considered by many engineers to be the best coincident stereo mike in the world, according to the jacket notes — and placed it front row center in the mezzanine balcony. The result is simply astounding in its realism. So real is it, in fact, that we get the odd shutter flap and wind leak in the distance of this spacious

blanket of sound.

This is not just another pizza organ record, either, though Don Thompson has built his reputation over the years for being a first-class entertainer at the Organ Grinder in Toronto. Don's playing is just right on this album — uptempo when it should be and lots of feeling when it's ballad time. And there is none of the gratuitous gimmickry he uses on a regular night at the restaurant. One might wish that his tempi would be more stable at times, and there are a lot of occasions where his harmonic progressions are, well, jarring — like jumping off the porch instead of going down the steps. But overall, Don has obviously approached this album with more than his usual degree of commercial enthusiasm.

The whole thing was recorded in one long afternoon session, with no combination pistons. Because of this, his playing tends to sound rushed in places. Rather than sacrifice registration for continuity, Don decided to splice — something many have done in the past — enabling him to re-register from section to section but necessitating much repetition and stop-and-go playing. The editing is for the most part clean, but there are several startling cuts. His combinations are almost exactly what the music calls for at any given moment. Sometimes they aren't as subtle as he would have liked, but in trying to overcome dead notes scattered throughout the organ he has done a fine job. All of which is to say that the playing and editing might not be perfect, but the sound itself more than makes up for these deficiencies.

One interesting note is that the room ambience has been carried through the crossovers between cuts, giving the impression of one long recording session. The idea works well.

The album comprises four medleys and four solos, leading off with some Jerome Kern favorites: "Who?", "You Are Love" and "I Won't Dance." This is followed by a lush "April in Paris," and side one finishes with eleven Memories of Romberg played in twelve minutes, nineteen seconds. It is a big organ intermission tour-de-force.

A medley from Richard Rodgers' *Babes in Arms* begins side two with a rising-out-of-the-pit intro that should have started side one. This writer's



Don Thompson.

favorite Thompson medley ("Where or When," "The Lady is a Tramp," "My Funny Valentine" and "Johnny One Note"), it is a nod to the Dixon style and lacks only a piano to make it the romp it can be. Kern appears again in a lovely salute to "Bill," followed by a medley from Franz Lehár's *Merry Widow*. Don gives the Intermezzo from *Cavalleria Rusticana* the introspection it warrants, and finishes with that lovely musical question, "How Are Things in Gloc-ca Morra?", ending quietly as in a dream.

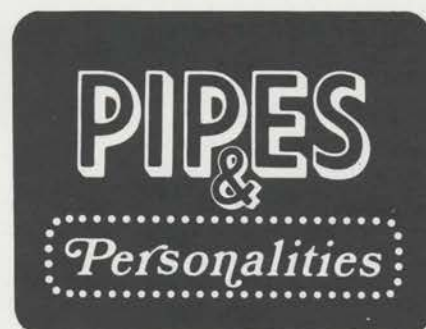
One wonderful thing about Don's arrangements is that he more often than not includes the verses to the tunes, adding that extra bit of warmth that makes the chorus fresh, though you've heard it hundreds of times before. He also keeps those glorious Fox Tibias and Voxes going for all they're worth. In fact, for an organist who is known as one with a British sound, his registrations here are as thick and American as you could wish.

The splendid double jacket is worth comment. On the cover is a stunning color close-up of the console, and on the back an equally stunning color shot of the auditorium taken from the dome. Five more black-and-whites adorn the inside, including a seldom-seen close-up of the lobby Möller console. Toronto organ buff Larry Partridge has written concise and informative notes on the theatre and its organs. It was Larry's idea that Don record this album, being an aficionado of the Fox theatres and

their organs.

The Downtown Theatre Enthusiasts, who maintain the organ in its commendable condition, did not think that it was in shape for recording at the time of taping (Spring 1982). Indeed, the organ shows a need for some regulation and dead notes were a problem, but by and large they were not obvious on this recording, and the organ sounds mighty good to these ears.

This, then, is an album to buy for the sound. The BIG sound. □



Nalle Discs Break Classical Barrier

Persistence on the part of a listener paid off in June when Duncan Pirnie, host of the "Around New York" program on WQXR, played a selection from Billy Nalle's NY/LIU album, "Big, Bold & Billy" during the program. Pirnie asked for audience reaction to the selection, and, as a result, opened or closed his program during the following weeks with selections from that album.

The remarkable thing about this is that WQXR, New York, is perhaps the "queen mother" of all classical music stations, and had never before played any theatre organ recording. But listener response was so great (over 300 calls and letters during the second week of July alone) that Pirnie requested copies of all available Nalle recordings, along with career and instrument information so that he could answer listeners' questions. Pirnie subsequently wrote to the Wichita Theatre Organ board of directors complimenting it on such fine recordings and urging that more be released of Nalle's music.

Further contributing to public awareness of the theatre organ, its artists and its music, is the broadcasting of the concerts of the Wichita Theatre Organ Wurlitzer Pops Series