

Europe calling America

By RALPH BARTLETT

IT IS A FACT that through Service visits and European vacations, there are many Americans, and Canadians for that matter, who know our organists almost as well as ourselves. With that view in mind, I present the first article on our better known towns—towns which loom largely on the radio and television.

The first town I am going to feature is often termed "The Playground of the North," catering as it does for millions per annum who like to spend their vacations in or near the "Golden Mile" . . . in other words, Blackpool. Dominating the Golden Mile is the world famous Tower, which caters for tens of thousands per day, with its ballroom, circus, zoo, aquarium, and every other pastime to amuse holidaymakers.

The Tower contains the wonder ballroom accommodating 2000 dancers, where Reginald Dixon reigns supreme at the Wurlitzer 3-14. Mr. Dixon has been resident for some twenty-six years, and has seen many changes in public taste as well as a change of organs, for in the early days he played a Wurlitzer 2-10. Reginald Dixon is no stranger to Southerners, as he toured Granada for many seasons during the Winter months prior to the 1939 war.

In the next Promenade block to the Tower is the Palace, containing a theatre, cinema, and a very select ballroom. The ballroom houses a neat and mellow Wurlitzer 3-9 which was, until the war, in Madame Tussaud's Cinema, London. Watson Holmes, who is the presiding organist, was formerly assistant to Reginald Dixon at the Tower, and even today takes over as relief during the hectic Summer season.

Up the road from the Palace and Tower, stands the Winter Gardens, once a rival concern, but now part of the huge Blackpool Tower Company. In these buildings lie a modern theatre, cinema, funfair, and a super ballroom, as well as numerous bars and restaurants. In the Empress Ballroom, which has room for more than 3000 dancers, and where also various conferences and championship ballroom dances are held, is a Wurlitzer 3-13. Horace Finch, the organist, has been with the company some thirty years, though not all that time as organist, for he was originally a pianist in the Tower orchestra.

The theatre in the Winter Gardens, the Opera House, is the largest outside London, and was the venue of a wonderful Command Performance in the presence of H.M. Queen Eliza-

beth II and H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh earlier in 1955. The theatre contains the best Wurlitzer of the four, being installed just prior to the war, and is a 3-13, with a master xylophone in the orchestra pit, and originally a grand piano on the stage, although this has now been moved to the Tower. The organ comes under the hands of Horace Finch, who was largely responsible for its design, and is used in Summer during the stage show highspot, and during the Winter as a solo instrument.

A short walk from the Winter Gardens, and very near the North Station, is the modern cream and blue Odeon Theatre which is stated to be the largest cinema in the North of England. It was built without an organ, but just after the war a Conacher 4-12 organ from the Ritz, Southend, Essex, was transferred there. It was opened by Al Bollington (now in the States), and he both broadcast and featured the instrument. It continued to be used daily for a few years, being played by various organists, then came a lapse and total silence, until a few seasons ago when Bobby Pagan arrived to feature it. Since that time the organ has again been silent, and until the Rank Organisation's policy changes there seems little hope of its return to life.

Blackpool, until a few years ago, had another unit organ, at the Palladium cinema. This was a beautifully toned Christie, but it had seen better years and was removed prior to the advent of CinemaScope, and went as scrap to a dealer—shame!

There have been three other cinema organs in the town, but they were so many years ago that most people have by now forgotten all about them. All were "straight" organs with pneumatic action, and ranks from one are incorporated in the organ of a Catholic church near Talbot Square, which is a few moment's walk from the Tower, Palace, and Winter Gardens. It is reported that the tones of the ex-cinema orchestral reeds are still unmistakable when heard at a voluntary or recital. Strange that the many organ enthusiasts who visit the town each season to hear the wonder Wurlitzers, do not know of this fine instrument.

Up and down the country, policy has resulted in many cinema organs being disused, under the excuse that they are no longer popular. Yet one has only to visit Blackpool to see the untruth of this statement. If anything, they are more popular than ever: little wonder, then, that the enthusiasts flock there whenever they can.

DISCOGRAPHY

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Liberty

254. SL-9003—10"—33—'56 "AN EXCURSION IN HILFL." Sel.: Cornish rhapsody (*Bath*), Cuban love song (*Stothart-McHugh-Fields*), Come back to Sorrento (*De Curtis*), Port-au-Prince, Moon of Manakoora (), Cross country (), Moonlight on the Ganges (*Ewing-Wallace*), It happened in Monterey (*Wayne-Rose*), Autumn in Rome (), Down the old ox road (*Coslow-Joluston*), Pigalle (*Ulmer-Konyon-Newman*), American rhapsody.

DUNLOP, MERRIL

- 3m/38r Welte-Mignon, Chicago Gospel Tabernacle World 255. WR600—10"—78—'54. Ivory Palaces (*Barraclough*), Safe in the arms of Jesus (), 256. WR601—10"—78—'54. Softly and tenderly (*Thompson*), Beneath the cross of Christ ().

DUNSTEDTER, EDDIE

- 2m/12 or 14r Kimball, Kimball Hall, Chicago Brunswick 257. 3678—10"—78. Dancing tambourine (*Polla*), Just a memory (*DeSylva-Brown-Henderson*). 258. 4148—10"—78. Neapolitan nights (*Zamcenik*), Sonny boy (*Jolson et al.*). 2m/7 to 10r Barton, Temple of Labor, Chicago, Ill. 259. 3762—10"—78. Among my souvenirs (*Leslie-Nicholls*), Desert song (*Romberg*). 260. 3928—10"—78. Girl of my dreams (*Clapp*), Ramona (*Wayne*). 261. 3943—10"—78. Rag doll (*Brown*), I think of what you used to think of me (*Turk-Hanley-Lyman*). With Abe Lyman's orchestra. 262. 3978—10"—78. Kiss me again (*Herbert*), Serenade (*Toselli*). 4m Special/c 26r Wurlitzer, Minnesota Theatre, Minneapolis, Minn. 263. 4292—10"—78. Marie (*Berlin*), Carolina moon (*Davis-Burke*).