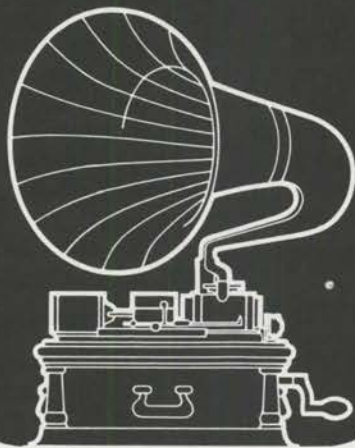


For The Records



Manufacturers, distributors or individuals sponsoring or merchandising organ recordings are encouraged to send review copies to the Record Reviewer, THEATRE ORGAN, 3448 Cowper Court, Palo Alto, California 94306. Be sure to include purchasing information (post-paid price, ordering address) and a photo of the artist which need not be returned.

BOB MITCHELL'S THEATER ORGAN FAVORITES. Cassette available from Bob Mitchell, 713 North Gramercy Place, Hollywood, California 90038. \$7.50 postpaid.

"Bob Mitchell's Theater Organ Favorites" is the most completely satisfying T.O. recording this reviewer has heard in many years. Bob is in total control of the 4/30 Master Kimball Pipe Organ at the St. James Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles. His playing is in the rich, lush style of Jesse Crawford and is flawless. Arrangements of tunes are imaginative and interesting, though carefully disciplined to the '40s mode, and his registrations couldn't be better.

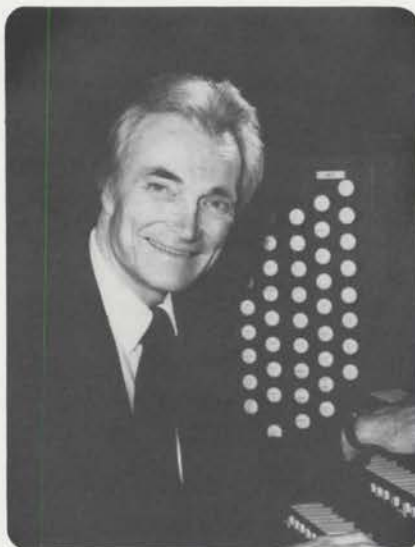
With the exceptions of "Sunny Side of the Street," "When You Wish Upon A Star" and perhaps "In Acapulco," the tunes are oldies one won't find on any other theatre recordings. "Sunny Side" is a brightly swinging barn burner without benefit of traps and cymbals, but with the happy drive of a master musician who knows precisely what he wants — and gets it. Nobody plays "Sunny Side" better than Bob. "When Summer is Gone"

is a long-forgotten tune that sounds better than it probably is. Mitchell plays a whole chorus on cathedral chimes and makes us like it. Anyone who can whistle or hum "Where Am I?" before hearing this tape wins the tune-trivia contest hands down. But Bob convinces us that the tune is well worth remembering. That, friends, is the hallmark of a real pro.

"Baby's Birthday Party" is a '30s novelty which adds punch and variety to the set. Bob carefully avoids the Kimball reeds (which tend to be a bit shrill in upper octaves) except in full ensemble registrations. "Wait and See" and "The House Jack Built for Jill" nicely round out the first side. This is thoroughly relaxing, beautiful music which makes no demands upon one's emotions other than a warm rush of nostalgia.

"In Acapulco" is compellingly Latin and a gracious reminder of the golden age of Xavier Cugat, Alice Faye, and Carmen Miranda. Bob makes sure we don't even miss the clatter of the toy counter. "When You Wish Upon A Star" is a lovely standard which Mitchell elevates to the level of a classic. "How Long Will It Last?" continues the romantic aura. "Why Did I Kiss That Girl?" introduces some gentle humor, and "Where's My Heart?" ends the set.

This reviewer's only complaint is that the tape seems to end much too soon. We could use a lot more of Bob Mitchell's playing. Forty years ago the Robert Mitchell Boys Choir made some excellent Standard Transcriptions of Christmas music for radio broadcast. What a joy it is to discover



Bob Mitchell

that the same Bob Mitchell has lost none of his impeccable taste and musicianship! Those who don't own a cassette tape deck will simply have to invest. "Bob Mitchell's Theater Organ Favorites" is not to be missed.

EDDIE WEAVER IN MILLER & RHODES TEA ROOM. Dolby stereo cassette. Available from Design Recording, 2650 Kentford Road, Midlothian, Virginia 23113. \$7.95 including First Class postage.

Musician Eddie Weaver with his Steinway grand and Hammond organ has been a popular daily attraction in downtown Richmond for more than 40 years where he has entertained some three million tea lovers. Smilin' Eddie is best known to us for his many theatre organ concerts and recordings on pipes. This reviewer would listen to Mr. Weaver anywhere. Correction: make that "almost anywhere." Let's dispense with the bad new first.

A Hammond organ can make lovely sounds within its sphere. This one probably does in the tea room with Eddie at the console. Unfortunately it doesn't on the tape. When you take a Hammond with its limited harmonic characteristics, add vibrato and Leslie, add electronic reverb and natural room reverb, and then mike it poorly, the end result is a homogenized blob of sound which is somewhere between a distant roar and a caterwaul. Any registration subtleties are lost in an echoing swamp of tones. Ironically, the piano is closely miked and right on top of the listener, cutting through each selection like a knife. Many — not all — of Eddie's 16 tunes are spoiled for this reviewer by recording strategies.

The best cut on Side I is Gershwin's "Fascinatin' Rhythm," a first rate jazz rendition and clever arrangement. Using the Hammond's fast attack and eliminating vibrato/trem makes the organ contribution to the duo palatable. "Kitten On the Keys" is another Weaver winner, although the clatter of glasses and tableware along with a few upper octave shrieks of the Hammond must be ignored. "The Best Things in Life Are Free," "In the Mood," and "Wedding of the Painted Doll" are all brightly up tempo and played with finesse. The piano wins in "Painted Doll" hands down. Eddie's pedal work is always



Eddie Weaver

superbly accurate.

Among the disasters are "As Time Goes By," "The Man I Love," "Chariots of Fire" and "Brazil." The vibrato in "As Time Goes By" is so pronounced that it makes the Steinway sound out of tune, and the final piano chorus is disjointed. "Don't Cry For Me, Argentina" may produce no weeping and wailing, but composers Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Weber are entitled to gnash a few molars. Best forgotten also are "Over the Rainbow," "Sunrise Serenade" and "I Don't Know Why." Eddie's arrangements are not up to his usual high standards, and the organ is no help at all.

"The Longest Time" swings nicely, and "Memory" from *Cats* is a pleasant, well balanced piano/organ duet. Weaver's program is a skillful

EDITOR'S NOTE

In reviewing the recording "Colonial Showtime — Don Thompson at the Colonial Theatre . . ." THEATRE ORGAN'S reviewer commented quite negatively about the final cut on Side I. The artist, who was unfamiliar with the original score of the selection, has pointed out that he unknowingly used a simplified version. Our reviewer has rechecked the recording against a copy of the score furnished by the artist and has found that his playing essentially agrees with the score he used. THEATRE ORGAN regrets the implication conveyed in the original statement.

menu of old and new, sweet and swing. Over all, this could have been a very pleasant tape if talent hadn't fallen victim to technology. According to the liner notes, Eddie Weaver follows faithfully two basic axioms of show business. The second axiom is "if it doesn't go, throw it out." The first is "smile." Good advice on both counts. The reviewer would like to suggest a third axiom for performers on certain brands of electronics which is a paraphrase of an old hymn, "Lord God of hosts, be with us yet. Leslie forget! Leslie forget!"

EDDIE WEAVER PLAYS THE BYRD THEATRE ORGAN. Dolby stereo cassette. Available from Design Recording, 2650 Kentford Road, Midlothian, Virginia 23113. \$7.95 including First Class postage.

For those who have been captivated by Eddie Weaver in concert or have enjoyed his prior recordings, a new cassette release on the Byrd Theatre Wurlitzer in Richmond should be cause for celebration. But don't pop the cork on your Dom Perignon until you've listened.

Surprisingly, Eddie's opener "Lida Rose" is the weakest of the 16 offerings. An over-registered "Lida" shuffles along unconvincingly with an implied beat which doesn't support this lady. In the final chorus she seems to get lost and just squat. Weaver's over-use of swell shade accents confuses the statement further. The Byrd piano (badly miked and out of tune) sounds blocks away and tired. "Caravan" is a routine reading of the Ellington standard with an approximation of an "oboe" and staccato strings. The arrangement dries up and falters just short of an oasis.

"April in Paris" is more what one expects from the gifted Eddie: lovely, lush, and introspective. Nice registrations build to a stirring climax. Counter melodies are fresh and original. "Ain't Misbehavin'" strides convincingly with some expert tonal contrasts. An up-tempo second chorus quickly loses steam, settling back into a romantic finish. The coda is a disaster.

Eddie never quite gets inside the ballad "Send In the Clowns," but it's pleasant and the piano obligato works well. The Sondheim tune is a difficult one to resolve without the lyrics as a guide. Weaver manages the resolu-

tion with authority and charm. "Havah Nagilah" begins with intense promise of the growing excitement of the dance. The arrangement is brilliant. Then for some reason the performance falls apart. The theme from "Airport" adds a contemporary touch to the program. Remember it? Nor will you after you've heard it again! But the Byrd Wurlitzer sounds great — thanks to Eddie. "Linger Awhile" has zip and dash, is expertly orchestrated, and serves as a happy affirmation of Eddie Weaver as one of the best of the vintage theatre organists.

Side II kicks off with a bright two-step interpretation of "Once In Love With Amy" — a refreshing escape from the usual soft-shoe treatment. Unfortunately the piano is still way, way out in left field. "Temptation Rag" is E.W. in top form. The other "Temptation" starts as a hoochy-koochy dance, but loses its beat as more pipes get into the act. "Loud" does not always equal "exciting." "Lilac Time" satisfies in spite of the piano obligato. It's pure theatre organ. "When You Wish Upon A Star" suffers by comparison with the ele-



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gant recent recording by Bob Mitchell. The Weaver performance is cut off unceremoniously as though he hadn't quite finished, but his tape engineers thought otherwise.

The excerpt from Handel's "Water Music" was a good enough program idea except that the "Water Music" sounds as though it is coming full blast from a fire hose. Much too heavy registration to rate it as other than a pizza parlor caricature of a classic. "Cotton Fields" is a prime example of Eddie Weaver's gift for delightful program surprises. Very tasty footwork and a skillful weaving of "Swanee River" into the proceedings. A most refreshing change from the usual T.O. fare. "Old Man River" is never a surprise whenever there is sufficient wind pressure to accommodate. Anyone who tackles the Kern tune had better "tote dat barge, an' lif' dat bail" with authority. Eddie "totes" and "lif's" with cymbal crashes, and the river flows with the restless rhythms of Smetana's "Moldau." There are good things in this interpretation, but it doesn't quite gel as a big finish.

This recording of the Byrd Wurlitzer in Dolby Stereo is not uniformly good, although the piano and other percussions suffer more than the pipes. Long time fans of Eddie Weaver will find much to admire on this release. Strangers to the Weaver mystique should be encouraged to discover prior recordings — or his next. Rumor hath it that Eddie is scheduled for a stint on the Shrine Mosque organ. We'll pop the bubbly for that any time!

Above reviews by WALTER J. BEAUPRE

POWERHOUSE. Donna Parker playing the Paramount Music Palace Wurlitzer. Record \$9.75 postpaid (cassette \$10.75) from Donna Parker Productions, Box 19371, Indianapolis, Indiana 46219.

Donna Parker is a musical phenomenon this reviewer has had his ear (and eyes!) on since she was circa 12 years old. Her playing made many an otherwise dull organ club meeting worth the long drive in southern California. She's still doing it. This is her fourth platter (some early ones were electronic) and easily her best to date. For some of the selections she adds the piano artistry of colleague Bill Vlasak to the advantage of the musi-

cal result. Their cooperation is good.

The instrument is a 4/42 assembled Wurlitzer, built up from an instrument a little more than half its present number of ranks, thanks mainly to the skills of John Ferguson. We have described the rebuild in past reviews so we won't repeat here.

The Paramount Music Palace, simply stated, is a pizza parlor. Does that mean the music consists of the very limited requests of pizza chompers? Not in this case; the music is concert quality. Let's examine the selections.

"Oh Gee, Oh Joy" (Gershwin) makes a good console raiser. It is melodic, rhythmic and appropriate for the insertion of those '20s breaks and endings, a specialty of Donna's.

"Me Minus You" is more of the same so far as mood and style are concerned, but Donna manages some interesting '20s instrumentation. Bill Vlasak's piano adds to the '20s atmosphere.

"So Blue" is one of the few tunes we have inherited from Helen Crawford, who always played second fiddle to husband Jesse after their marriage. After a brief but atmospheric intro, the organ's lush Tibias and Vox take over to carry the emotional 3/4 ballad. Naturally, there's more than a hint of Jesse Crawford's recording of it.

It's big organ time for "Fanfare," a work of the famed organist/composer Richard Purvis. The title describes it perfectly, so much so we can conjure a heraldic scene from when knighthood was in flower, perhaps a joust. The organ's generous brass section and a pattern of pointed 4th and 5th intervals on the pedals dominate this thriller.

It's quite an emotional and technical switch to the old Vienna of tunesmith Robert Stolz. Donna makes the transition from clanking armor to the graceful waltz easily with "Two Hearts in Three-quarter Time." The composer, a man this reviewer knew during an extended stay in Austria some years back, would approve of Donna's treatment. She captures the idiom in this too brief offering.

Manual de Falla's "Ritual Fire Dance" has long been popular with both organists and audiences. It's a very dramatic piece and Donna makes the most of it. From those first trills, then the syncopation, the organ's brass and percussions carry the load.



Donna today — a wife, mother and organist.

Side II opens with the album title tune, "Powerhouse." During the late '30s, Raymond Scott (later the *Hit Parade* conductor) released jazz recordings that were different. Using from 5 to 7 musicians, the recorded result sounded much fuller. It was then determined that Scott's musicians were humming different musical lines than those they were playing on their instruments. It worked! Donna isn't limited by the number of players she wants to suggest; she has the full facilities of a fine and large theatre organ, made so originally by John Ferguson and now maintained by Carlton Smith, Larry MacPherson, Vickie Wills and others (we still haven't fathomed the true status of Harry Helton, who is credited on the jacket as the "genius").

But back to "Powerhouse." It's wild, to say the least. That intricate, fast melody (on Xylophone) is the type of music with which Donna first made her mark. We can still hear the 14-year-old knocking out a letter-perfect "Dizzy Fingers" on the 4/61 Robert-Morton during an ATOS free-for-all at the LA Elks Temple. She plays the fast ones well.

Cole Porter's "So in Love" features Bill Vlasak on the 88. Donna and Bill share the melody line but the effect seems best when Donna handles the "orchestra" while Bill does frippery. Bill solos effectively for a few memorable measures. Then the shared denouement. Nice cooperation.

"Don't Be That Way" is played by Donna in the swingband style of Benny Goodman, an art at which she is especially effective. The Posthorn punctuation is perfect against the baritone melody line. Donna includes a pleasant Glockenspiel-dominated few

measures of jazz variations.

It isn't easy for moderns to appreciate the passion of the Valentino tango as it was played and danced in the early years of this century. To get a better than rough idea, listen to Donna's version of "Ecstasy Tango." All the ungoverned spirit of 1919 is present in Donna's impassioned reading.

We are transported way back to the early '30s for "Reaching for the Moon." We recall a movie which starred Douglas Fairbanks Sr. and Bebe Daniels and you still might catch it on late night TV. Meanwhile, Donna's smooth version does very nicely.

The closer is another welcome cooperative effort by Donna and Bill Vlasak, who is Donna's colleague at *The Music Palace*. Incidentally, we will review Bill's current recording, played on this same organ, in an upcoming column. "I Won't Dance" is played at just the right tempo for Fred and Ginger, in strict rhythm, naturally, a perfect closer.

These selections were favorites of Donna's dad, Richard Parker, who departed this vale of tears recently. So this biscuit is Donna's tribute to the father who encouraged her musical career. It's a worthy selection; Papa Parker had top drawer taste in music, a wide variety of titles and styles.

Recording is excellent. There were a few clicks in our review pressing but not enough to damage the music. The pressing was perfectly centered, so no "wow."



Donna Parker playing a demo concert in 1974.

A smiling color photo of Donna is shown at the console (is it French style or Waterfall?). Jacket notes are brief but adequate if you are a Music Palace fan. There are photos of lovely Donna on the back and one poignant shot of Donna dancing with her late father.

It's a good package.

BELOVED OLD SONGS AND LIGHT CLASSICS. John W. Landon plays the Page organ in the Anderson Paramount Theatre. Available on cassette tape only. \$8.00 post-

paid from Paramount Organ Society, 902 East 27th Street, Anderson, Indiana 46014.

John Landon is easily one of the most faithful of organ boosters, both classical and theatrical. He is the author of two volumes dealing with the theatre organ lore, a history of the instrument and a biography of Jesse Crawford. These are in addition to many magazine articles as well as slide-illustrated lectures about theatre instruments. He's also an ordained minister and a college-level educator in social sciences. But all these responsibilities don't keep him from heading for Anderson on Saturday night (he lives in Kentucky) to play intermissions on his first love, the 3/7 Page organ in the Paramount, which he discovered in 1955 and has been nurturing ever since. Even from this brief listing of his activities, it is quite obvious that John Landon leads a very full life.

He is perhaps happiest when he is playing the Page (even though he has both a classical organ and a theatre organ in his old Kentucky home). This becomes quite obvious on auditioning this tape. Landon has made several records previously but we feel the music presented here is his finest theatrical work to date.

One reason is the list of selections. He has steered clear of current music of limited life span as well as the pasta parlor menu, material which tends to dominate some areas of organ record releases. Instead he has reached far back to the early years of this century for a melange of then popular and semi-classic tunes. To old timers with long memories, it will seem like a slice out of the past to hear once again tunes popular on radio when they were young, perhaps on a WLW *Moon River* radiocast. For the young folks it's a chance to hear what they missed.

Other reasons are the expression and orchestration Landon applies. The former has to do with use of the swell pedal and associated phrasing. His score is high. One would assume that variety in registration would be sparse on a 7-rank organ. It is not. A look at the stoprail helps (the cassette includes a photo). The 7-rank console appears to have as many stopkeys as Wurlitzer's 14-rank style 260. Page indulged in a lot more unification than most other builders. It would seem that Page's generous unification

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John Landon

provides the variety of registration here. Of course, like all true theatre organs the little Page is Tibia-dominated, but there is lots more. One is never aware the combination possibilities are limited. The overall result is a big organ sound. That's also a plus for the organist; he knows how to mix his available combinations. Let's examine some of the selections.

"Londonderry Air" is played straightforward on theatrical registration with a bit of "trem's off" near the conclusion.

"Sextet" (from *Lucia*) has none of the often overblown characteristics of opera as presented here. Rather it's heard as rather quiet theatrical music with the melody soloed initially on the Tibia. Pretty music.

That wonderful, old Irish love song, "I'll Take You Home Again Kathleen," has been too long neglected by recording organists. It's the story, told in the title, of an emigrant who pines for "the ould sod" and the understanding shown by her beloved. The music adds up to perfect ballad material for T.O. registration, and no lyrics are needed to convey the message in John Landon's expressive treatment.

"Waltz Amourese" is a European-style tune played here in the grand manner and featuring the Page's excellent solo (brass) reed.

"In the Gloaming" is another memory jogger which will appeal to veteran listeners. It's a lovely old tune and Landon's registration is just right.

"Lay My Head Beneath a Rose" is typical of the often mawkish sentimentality of the '20s when the then new broadcasting phenomenon plastered the airwaves with every aspiring and perspiring tenor's version of it.

Stripped of its lyrics, it's not a bad tune as registered by John Landon.

"The Garden of Tomorrow" is a much more appropriate representation of '20s semi-classic songs. John starts, appropriately with the verse. It is played dramatically throughout; it is very suitable to "big organ" ballad styling. John makes the most of this long ago winner.

The Page's soft percussions are heard accompanying the Tibia solo during an atmospheric "Stars of the Summer Night."

John again borrows a melody from opera for "My Heart at thy Sweet Voice," the love theme from *Samson and Delilah*. John plays it as a love song — simply.

Side II opens with one of the most beloved instrumental interludes in the opera repertoire, the "Intermezzo" from *Cavalleria Rusticana*, initially played on the tenor register of the Page's solo brass reed, later on full combinations. Some of the reed's notes heard here may require a voicing touch up but only sharp-eared critics will notice.

"The Sea Shell" is one of those elusive tunes from long ago — one beginners may have had as a music lesson.

Shades of the barbershop quartet, it's "Sweet Genevieve" in all her harmonic glory. The program is rounded out with "A Dream," a maestoso "Forgotten" (remember, vocal students?), "Long, Long Ago" (remember, pointer system organists?), "Juanita," and a reverent "Panis Angelicus" with Dvořák's "Goin' Home" a good low-key closer.

All selections are memory jolters which will appeal to old timers and help establish the musical "feel" of the early years of this century to the young fans. Also evident are the styles in which the tunes were heard "back then," because John Landon plays with authenticity. These ballads could be the content of a long ago organ broadcast.

Recording is good. The jacket notes are there, too — in very small type. There is information about the music, the instrument and the organist for those with good eyesight or a pocket magnifier. All are well done.

John Landon receives no royalties of any kind for his services. All profits are earmarked for the maintenance of the Page 3/7 (typical). Is it any wonder that we want to see this presentation succeed!

THEATRE ORGANISTS OF THE PAST, Vol. II. Cassette available from the Creegan Company, Inc., 510 Washington Street, Steubenville, Ohio 43952. \$14.95 postpaid.

A few months ago we reviewed, in these pages, the first in this series of professional quality cassettes. Now Volume II has reached our desk and we are delighted to call it to the attention of all theatre organ enthusiasts.

Volume II features 60 minutes of the cream of the crop of yesterday's theatre organs and organists. Side I begins with two of Jesse Crawford's best organ solos from the golden days of the New York Paramount (Studio), "I Love to Hear You Singing" and "Pale Moon," dating from 1929 and 1932 respectively. The elusive Helen Crawford is heard at the same organ accompanying Bing Crosby who sings, "Can't We Talk It Over?"

Other artists featured include: Lew White, Eddie Dunstedter, a rare Edison disc performance by Henrietta Kamern at Loew's Rio Theatre (New York City), Preston Sellers at the WGN pipe organ with the American Radio Warblers (canaries) as heard on network radio in the 1930s and '40s, George Epstein, Edwin Sawtelle, Erwin Yeo, Robinson Cleaver, Quentin Maclean, Reginald Foort, Dick Leibert and John Priest. Organs include: the New York Paramount Studio Wurlitzer, the Roxy Theatre rotunda Kimball (New York City), a Möller from Loew's Rio Theatre (New York City), the Robert-Morton in the Waikiki Theatre (Honolulu), the E.M.I. Compton (London), the Warner Brothers Studio Wurlitzer (Hollywood), the Trocadero Wurlitzer (London), the Christie in the Regal Marble Arch (London), the Skinner New York City Studio organ and a few other Wurlitzers and Kimballs.

George Creegan, President of the Creegan Company, has informed this writer that sales of Volume I exceeded sales of all other cassettes of reissues of 78 rpm discs featuring classical and popular artists of the past. If sales of Volume II come up to expectations, a volume devoted entirely to the best work of Jesse Crawford is likely. I can hardly wait!

Each cassette includes notes with full information about the artists and organs and the discs on which they were originally recorded.

DR. JOHN W. LANDON □