

## May we introduce . . . SIMON GLEDHILL



Simon Gledhill

Although still only 20 years old, Simon Gledhill is no stranger to British theatre organ audiences. He has very rapidly made a name for himself during the past four years.

Simon's musical awareness became apparent at an early age, and when he was seven, his fascination with a friend's toy accordion was so great that Simon decided this was the instrument he wanted to play. At the age of 16, he was runner-up in the British Under-18 Solo Accordion Championships and was the Advanced Duet Champion.

Simon's interest in the organ developed concurrently with his study of the accordion, and in his early teens he began lessons with Michael Woodhead, one of the foremost home-organ teachers in the north of England. In 1982 he passed grade eight with honors in the organ examinations of the Southern Music Training Centre and was awarded their Founders Cup for achieving the highest mark of all candidates in the country.

John Norris, Principal of the SMTC, encouraged Simon to consider the theatre organ, which he did, and his interest developed more strongly after a suggestion from theatre

organist David Shepherd that he should enter the Northern Young Organist of the Year competition. In January 1982, at the age of 16, he played a theatre organ for the first time. Just three months later he won the Northern contest with flying colors, which led to an immediate booking on the prestigious weekly BBC show, *The Organist Entertains*.

Simon immediately scoured the country for any theatre organs he could find and studied intensely all aspects of the lore and legend of the instrument. Within a short time he was able to play any instrument, however peculiar, with great flair and confidence, and his knowledge of the whole theatre organ scene, both in Britain and the USA, gained him a reputation and status previously unknown in one so young.

The Cinema Organ Society found Simon to be the natural choice to be the first holder of their annual Ian Sutherland Award to an up-and-coming organist. As a result, he performed a spectacular concert at the magnificent, Art Deco Grays State Theatre where he was presented to an enthusiastic audience by famous broadcasting organist Nigel Ogden.

For the past two years, Simon has been studying Natural Sciences at Cambridge University. All the major theatre organ groups have been clamoring to book him for their shows, but he very sensibly accepts bookings only during the vacations, proving that it is possible to combine university life with the world of theatre organ.

"The finest theatre organ playing this side of the Atlantic!" This comment came from a well-known theatre organist after hearing one of Simon's shows. Another artist, at a chance meeting with Simon at another venue, said to him, "I know you — you're brilliant!" Simon's first recording, "Simply Simon," was a sell-out. He has two albums in the catalogs at present. "Journey into Melody" is a cassette featuring the Granada Walthamstow Christie and "The Spirit of Youth" is a record made on the Ossett Town Hall Compton.

Simon is an avid listener. "I enjoy the styles of a wide range of theatre organists," he says, "and I would certainly include George Wright, Lyn Larsen, Walt Strony, Jim Roseveare, Bryan Rodwell, David Shepherd, Nigel Ogden, Sidney Torch and Quentin Maclean amongst my favorites." Hints of some of these artists filter through in Simon's playing, but he is in no way a clone of any of them — he has an identifiable style all his own, and he is clearly destined to go down in history as one of the small number of artists who will have defined the scope and range of this singular musical instrument.

Simon is a devotee of the American theatre organ scene. "I admire the professionalism shown in musicianship, presentation and technical standards in a great many aspects of American theatre organ life," he says, "and I would love to play some of the fine instruments that I've had the pleasure of hearing on records."

Simon can be contacted at 13 Norton Street, Elland, West Yorkshire, HX5 OLU, England.

JOHN LEEMING □