

JONAS NORDWALL — LIVE AT MUNDELEIN, Recorded live June 14, 1987. Order from CATOE, c/o James L. West, 900-C Crescent Street, Wheaton, Illinois 60187. Cost is \$11 postpaid.

THEATRE ORGAN readers are experiencing a first! The artist is the reviewer of his own playing. This could be the "creme de la creme" opportunity for some of my colleagues; however, I prefer my intentions to be that of a severe critic, which is the way that we will all benefit.

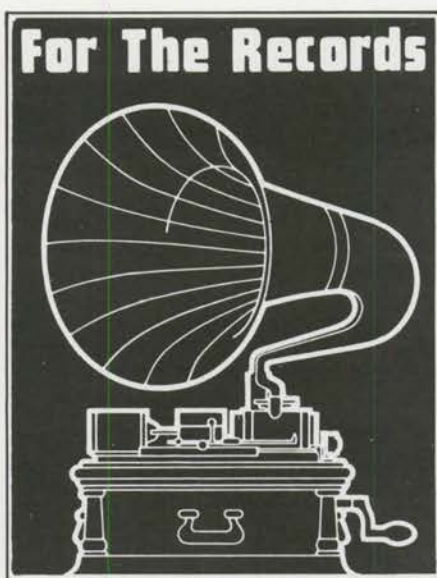
THE EVENT — The day of this particular recorded program was a 90(+) degree day, which organs have difficulty accommodating, and I felt the audience was most gracious to attend. On such days, the preferred activity is to be sitting in the shade or on a breezy waterway sipping one's favorite "Hot Weather" beverage rather than attending an organ recital. Nevertheless, a concert featuring myself and Dwight Thomas, the 1986 Young Artist Competition winner, had been scheduled and was performed.

THE RECORDING — The overall quality of the recording and tape reproduction is a B+. Knowing and understanding the conditions which the engineer had to contend with, the results of the organ pickup are satisfying. The only problem herein lies with the makeshift PA system that exists at Mundelein, which should be replaced. The announcements are muddled, which was also the case during the concert. They should have been omitted from the tape.

THE PLAYING — With all factors considered, the heat, the organ, the wonderful attitude of the audience (which always helps), and the ever-present Lady Luck, the performance was better than passable. **HOWEVER**, when the decision to release a tape of a live performance for national distribution is made without notification to the artist for comment or consent, and knowing what my personal standards are for recorded material, the playing is **SUBSTANDARD**. Please take note!!! Recording sessions occur for very special reasons. In addition to placing one's reputation on the line, the end result is a product of the artist's finest effort which requires maximum concentration without any distractions. Such conditions do not occur during a live performance where organ malfunctions, audience distractions (i.e. tape recorders snapping), attention to elapsing time, etc., reduce absolute concentration to a minimum.

THE ORGAN — This was not the Mundelein sound that I remember from visiting the organ in its heyday, but it still

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has its exciting moments and ranks among the best musical theatre organs around.

THE DISAPPOINTMENTS — In addition to the aforementioned items, I feel that the omission of Dwight Thomas' portion of the program was a grave error. He is one of the few musicians on an organ bench and deserves to be heard. On behalf of the CATOE-tape producers, I apologize to Dwight for this oversight. Remember, if ATOS is going to continue, recognition of the younger organists has to begin ... **NOW**.

Finally, as a message from my former record producer, the late Bill Peterson, "**proofread . . . proofread . . . PROOF-READ!**" The last name is **NORDWALL . . . not NORWALL!** Thank you for this opportunity. JGN

KAY McABEE AT THE MAGNIFICENT ROXY ORGAN. Kay McAbee at the 5/28 Hybrid in the Ramada Classic Hotel Ballroom. Available from Kay McAbee, 1834 California Northeast, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87110. Dolby cassette, \$11 postpaid.

So much has been written about this excellent instrument (see THEATRE ORGAN, July/August 1984) that I can only add that all parties concerned must have tended to this organ with loving care. It is tonally finished and nicely balanced.

Kay McAbee leans toward big registrations and larger-than-life arrangements. He is also technically superb and has a fascinating approach to harmony and accompaniment. A most dynamic and exciting artist who is also having such a good time himself that it's quite impossible not to get caught up in his music. "Falling Love with Love" is worth the entire price of the tape. This arrangement is not to be believed, and in lesser hands would have fallen apart. "Stranger in Paradise" is also unique and innovative. All selections are strong, interesting and well-executed. They are: "Lullaby of Broadway," "Stay As Sweet As You Are," "Tick-tack-toe," "The Breeze and I," "You'll Never Walk Alone," "Second Hungarian Rhapsody," "In A Persian Market," "Spring Is Here," "Americans We" and "A Perfect Day."

The recording is well done. Microphone placement is perfect. Recording engineer Jim Stenke is to be complimented for his excellent work.

If you believe that theatre organ should be fun, by all means buy this tape!

Bob Shafter

Just Released!

JONAS NORDWALL Live at Mundelein

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Please include your printed name, address & phone number.

TOP RANK RHYTHM, Michael Wooldridge at the Christie Theatre Organ. Available from: COS Tapes, 23 Aveling Park Road, London E17 4NS, England. Dolby cassette only, \$9 postpaid.

Another fine recording from England, this tape has much to commend itself to audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. Recorded in 1984 at the Top Rank Club, Edmonton, this 4/15 Christie has since been moved to Memorial Hall in Barry, South Wales. This organ was originally made famous by Sydney Torch in the 1930s, but has obviously been worked with since that time. The tremors are now a little slow for my taste, but the overall blend is better. This organ is at once incredibly beautiful and gutsy. I'm going to go out on a limb here and say this is the finest British organ I've yet heard.

Mr. Wooldridge tackles a number of tired old warhorses and breathes new life into them. A wide variety of selections is included on this "Take The A Train," "Moonglow," "Great Day" and "Love Is A Song" each have an arrangement which is well-suited to it. "I Got Rhythm" is so unique, innovative and well-executed that it gets "A+" marks, while "A Nightingale Sang in Berkley Square" is so lush and beautiful it could make a statue cry. "Nola" and "These Foolish Things" are insecure in a couple of places, but the arrangements are good. Overall, Mr. Wooldridge is technically well-developed and sensitive to the needs of each tune, and he certainly know how to get the most from this fabulous instrument.

Microphone placement is superb, and the organ is perfectly recorded. Mastering and transfer are clean and noise-free.

Don't miss this opportunity to make an excellent addition to your theatre organ collection.

Bob Shafter

JOURNEY INTO MELODY: Music for a Quiet Evening. Ashley Miller at the Wurlitzer theatre pipe organ. FTC 2031. Order from Film Technology Company, 6900 Santa Monica Boulevard, Hollywood California 90038. Price is \$14.95 plus \$2 postage and handling.

This is the first recording by Ashley Miller on a CD and represents a break in what has been many years of "silence" from Ashley in the form of recordings. Many readers will recall with fondness some of Ashley's exciting and tasteful recordings at Radio City Music Hall, and others will recall attending one of his recent recitals. Everyone knows Ashley as the durable, active member of the American Theatre Organ Society.

Film Technology Company has produced this CD with great care and attention to detail. Ashley could not have performed for a more qualified and capable recording company. Pictures and liner notes are elegantly assembled into an informative and attractive package.

Credits are complete, and just the right amount of technical details are given to appeal to the audiophile and organ technician alike.

With the packaging done tastefully, the listener is eager to see if the recording quality measures up to the same level of accomplishment. JOURNEY INTO MELODY succeeds in doing just that. A full spectrum of sound and a delicate balance between the instrument and artificial ambience is provided.

Ashley's goal in this recording is to recall some of the timeless melodies of our era which call upon the listener to relax amongst memories and melodies. Played with the breezy, yet beguiling, style that is natural to Ashley, the recording is completely successful in its intent — to relax the listener with songs masterfully played on the theatre pipe organ.

The theatre pipe organ is a most remarkable instrument in its ability to capture the senses in such a manner that one is sometimes prone to feel as if more is taking place than merely an organist playing a song. JOURNEY INTO MELODY explores one capability of the theatre organ that has often been overlooked by recording artists — music for relaxation. The listener will not find large stop combinations or a display of technical prowess. What the listener will find is a collection of melodies, faithfully played as written and tastefully interpreted through registration and expression, all presented with a love for the music that is most inviting.

Remarkably, after listening to the recording, one is hard-pressed to recall the instrument. Perhaps this is the ultimate compliment to the organbuilder — that the instrument becomes transparent to the artist. Clearly, the Wurlitzer used in this recording performs exactly as Ashley would want. Housed in the Sargent/Stark home in Hollywood, it is an instrument of considerable resources, not the least of which is the lyrical presentation of the ballad.

This recording will provide the CD collector with an even wider variety of styles than previously available. Ashley Miller fans will find it both satisfying and refreshingly different.

Stephen L. Adams

LEGENDARY THEATRE ORGANISTS, Vintage Films of Solo Presentations, Pictorials and Sing-Alongs. FTC 2032 VHS Video Tape. Available from Film Technology Company, 6900 Santa Monica Boulevard, Hollywood, California 90038. Cost is \$29.95 plus \$3 postage and handling.

In a column that has traditionally reviewed records, tapes and, more recently, CDs, it seems strangely providential that a video tape recording should make its entrance into the theatre pipe organ world. The talented people at Film Technology have brought to the public a most unique look into the past we all hold so dear.

Gaylord Carter is our host for this glimpse into the magical era of silent films and their subsequent transition into sound. Gaylord's long and colorful career is presented to the viewer from the four-manual console in the Sargent/Stark residence in Hollywood. His camera presence is robust, engaging and sentimental. It would be difficult for anyone not to be captivated by this warm, loving gentleman who is happy and thankful for a wonderful career in music.

During the 52-minute journey into the era of theatre organ accompaniment in the theatre, Gaylord recalls the talents and performances of Ann Leaf, Jesse Crawford, Dick Leibert, Lew White, Reginald Foort and Don Baker. Footage of each, playing popular songs of their day, brings the viewer into an intriguing proximity to the artists. Rare films which dramatize the lyrics of a song being played are suggestive of contemporary rock videos. MTV apparently found its roots in the first half of this century!

LEGENDARY THEATRE ORGANISTS is clearly an effective educational tool which would introduce the unaware to the fascinating world of the theatre organ. Packaging is superb. The quality of the production is on a par with all of the other offerings by Film Technology — excellent. Of particular note is the remarkably original condition of the film clips. Little or no scratches or editing are found in these rare prints. The theatre historian will delight in the sharp, light sequences showing Don Baker playing the New York Paramount Wurlitzer and Ann Leaf at the Paramount Studio Wurlitzer. The sound on these clips is good enough to give the listener a feel for the exceptional tonal characteristics of these famous instruments.

Only two points exist which bear critical comment: first, an edit early in the narration by Gaylord Carter caught this reviewer's eye. While well within the acceptable range, the uncommonly high quality of the mastering of this tape revealed this momentary hesitation in the progress of the program; second, once the tape has been viewed, the viewer is left with a strong desire to check the box for an indication of other video tapes in a series and is disappointed to find that none is announced. I sincerely hope that Film Technology has plans to produce further volumes documenting this marvelous era in music — LEGENDARY THEATRE ORGANISTS leaves one wanting to see more!

Stephen L. Adams

Portland
has all the fun!

FUSION! Rob Richards at the Senate Theatre 4/34 Wurlitzer with a Yamaha FX-20. Order from Rob Richards, 747 South Extension #222, Mesa, Arizona 85202. Cost is \$12 for the LP and \$10 for the cassette, both postpaid.

This recording will undoubtedly stimulate some of the best good-natured controversy to touch the organ world in ages. My prediction is that listeners will polarize into two groups: those who, with this reviewer, will shout "Hooray!" and those who, expecting yet another clone of a tried-and-true theatre organ formula, will be disappointed.

The concept of playing a synthesizer with a theatre organ isn't new; John Seng was doing it two decades ago. What is new about Rob Richards' effort is that, in overall concept, it isn't really an organ recording. Instead, the listener senses a whole ensemble of musicians of whom the organist is only one, sometimes playing a solo role and sometimes stepping into the background while a lead guitar or flute takes the melody. Contemporary synthesizers do a lot more than just produce funky electronic sounds. Rob Richards uses the synthesizer's capacity to simulate real instruments, resulting in the illusion that four or five real instrumentalists are performing, not just Rob alone. The percussions are particularly realistic; it is as if a live drummer were present — a far cry from the boom-chucka-boom rhythm units of yesteryear.

This recording has as eclectic a range of tunes as one is likely to find; for example, the rock theme from *Footloose* is followed by "The Lost Chord!" Each is presented in an appropriate musical style and, although an occasional Buddy Cole or John Seng influence might be felt, the listener will never say, "that sounds like so-and-so." How refreshing! Richards is a rare breed — a true original. He is also an extremely talented musician. If there is one factor that permeates this diverse program, it is Richards' consistently excellent musicianship and sense of good taste. He uses enough "modern" harmonies to sustain the interest of those such as this reviewer, yet he uses them sparingly enough that more traditional ears will not be offended.

To sum up, I found this recording refreshing, exciting and an innovative way of using the theatre organ in a contemporary setting. To those who are skeptical because it's not traditional theatre organ, I say give it a try; it just might broaden your horizons — and you definitely won't be disappointed with the level of musicianship. Report card: A. Well done, indeed, Rob!

David L. Junchen

**Theatre Organ
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HERE COMES THE BRIDE, Immortal Wedding Music, Lyn Larsen at Fountain Street Baptist Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Pro-Arte Compact Disk CDD 344. The organ is a 1924 E.M. Skinner, rebuilt in 1959 by Casavant, new console and Bombarde division by Tellers in 1970. Available in record stores or from Musical Contrasts, Inc., P.O. Box 16786, Phoenix, Arizona 85011. Playing time 52:52.

Selections: "Riguadon" (Campra), "Trumpet Voluntary" (Purcell), "Bridal Chorus" - Lohengrin (R. Wagner), "Be Thou So Near" (J.S. Bach), "Oh, Perfect Love" (arr. Virgil Fox), "Le Rondeau" - Masterpiece Theatre Theme (Mouret), "Psalm XIX" (Marcello), "I Love You Truly" (C.J. Bond), "Because" (G.D'Hardelot), "I Love Thee" (Grieg), "Erotik" (Grieg), "The Lord's Prayer" (A.H. Mallott), "Trumpet Tune" (Stanley), "Trumpet Tune" (Clarke), "Now, Thank We All Our God" (J.S. Bach), and "Wedding March" - *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Mendelssohn).

Except for a short bio on Lyn and a list of his other compact discs, that's all folks, for liner notes. Sure wish there was more about the organ.

The microphones appear to be quite close to the organ. Perhaps a little distance from the organ would have given less action noise and more ensemble development. Here is a chance, however, to sit near some gorgeous E.M. Skinner orchestral voices, played with sensitivity.

The album, obviously in remembrance of Virgil Fox, is reminiscent of a similar LP released some years ago by the late master. While Lyn reminds us of Dr. Fox, he also shows his own ability to interpret the music of the masters with clean playing and notable pedal-work.

While this recording was not made on a theatre organ, the music offers some ideas for prospective brides and gives some alternatives to the trite old "war horses" heard at so many weddings. Also, got any woofers you want to test?

Now, if almost 53 minutes of good music isn't enough, the package included, at no extra cost, a cassette copy of the CD so you can load up your "Walkman/woman" or car tape player and take the performance with you.

Harry Heth

GIVE MY REGARDS: Lyn Larsen at the Wichita Century II Convention Center. Pro-Arte Compact Disc CDD 339. Available in record stores or from Musical Contrasts, Inc., P.O. Box 16786, Phoenix, Arizona 85011. Price is \$15.75. Playing time 51:41.

Selections: "Give My Regards to Broadway"; from *South Pacific*, "Bali Hai," "Younger Than Springtime," "Wonderful Guy," "Dites Moi," "Some Enchanted Evening," "Happy Talk," and "This Nearly Was Mine"; from *Cats*, "Memory"; from *A Chorus Line*,

"One", and "What I Did For Love"; from *A Little Night Music*, "Send In The Clowns"; and from *La Cage Aux Folles*, "We Are What We Are," "With You In My Arms," "Masculinity," "The Best of Times," and "Look Over There."

This offering is, by far, the most imaginative of the recordings by Lyn at Century II on the "Queen Mother" Wurlitzer. Lyn is giving us counter melodies (students, take note), dynamics, and colorful registrations. Some of the cleanest playing you will ever hear is in the verse of "Wonderful Guy" from *South Pacific*.

The recording is fairly "tight" due to a close-in placement of the microphones, but does not give us very much stereo separation.

This album is definitely a "must buy" even though the front cover indicates the presence of music from *The Sound of Music*, but doesn't deliver. The liner notes are basically an extract from the insert in the previous three CDs.

Harry Heth

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