

May We Introduce . . .



IAIN FLITCROFT

Each year the British Cinema Organ Society makes an award to an up-and-coming young theatre organist, choosing someone who has shown considerable aptitude for and interest in that singular musical instrument. The Ian Sutherland Award, as it is known, has, for 1987-88, been given to a very talented young man from the north of England, Iain Flitcroft.

From a very early age Iain had been intrigued by the sound of the church organ, and by the age of six, he had firmly declared to his parents that he would like to learn that instrument. Having been told that he must start with the piano, this he did, taking grades one to eight. By then he was 12 years old, and was soon having organ lessons from John Robinson at Preston, his home town. At the age of 15 he became Organist and Choirmaster at St. Paul's Church, Farington, a position which he held until he was 18.

However, a couple of years earlier, Iain happened to obtain a copy of William Davies's album, "Mighty Wurlitzer," recorded at the Granada Theatre, Kingston. It was a real ear-opener for Iain that

an organ could sound like that, and he was soon making enquiries about having lessons in theatrical playing. With the aid of a phone book, Iain's father discovered an organ teacher by the name of Ernest Broadbent — a famous former resident organist at the Blackpool Tower; after a quick phone call, Iain was on Ernest's books, rapidly picking up all he was taught.

Ernest was so impressed by Iain's progress, that he recommended him for a half-concert at the Three Js Entertainment Centre, Gomersal, and this was the start of a series of regular visits there. At the same time, Alan Ashton recorded Iain on the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, Wurlitzer for his popular Radio show. He entered for the Wersi European Young Organists' Competition, and became the U.K. finalist. Mike Slater, talent-spotter from the Tower Ballroom, soon had Iain involved at Blackpool, part time to begin with, then full time on various organs in the Tower complex, ending up on the Wurlitzer in 1987. Unfortunately Iain was not able to continue this commitment after he took up a place at Birmingham

ham Polytechnic to study Business Studies, for obvious practical reasons.

"I learned a lot from Phil Kelsall while I was at the Tower," said Iain, "but I find myself influenced by other players, too. Ernest Broadbent, of course, is one of these great influences in my life, but I also enjoy some of the American stylists, such as George Wright and Ron Rhode. I find I can enjoy a wide range of theatre organ styles," Iain added, "But there's one proviso — it's got to be good!"

Iain is already beginning to become established as a concert performer, and has recently concertized in various venues in both Britain and Holland. "I don't want to make the theatre organ a full-time career," Iain confessed, "but I do enjoy playing some of the fine Wurlitzers we have in Britain, such as the Tower, Thursford, Kilburn and Worthing. That doesn't mean that I've anything against other makes," he went on, "in fact I have just as much fun playing a good Compton, like the superb example at The Plough, Great Munden."

Iain can be contacted at 150 Halliwell Road, Bolton, Lancashire, England.

John Leeming

Photo shows Iain Flitcroft at the Worthing Assembly Hall Wurlitzer. (John D. Sharp photo)