



A WALT STRONY CONCERT: At The California Theatre. Order from Theatre Organ Society of San Diego, P.O. Box 11536, San Diego, California 92111. Cost is \$13.00 postpaid.

Before beginning this review, I must admit that Walt Strony is one of my best friends. Nevertheless, I pledge to tell the truth! Let me say flat out that Walt is one of my three favorite contemporary theatre organists. The evolution of his musicianship over the past decade has been phenomenal. He doesn't just "turn the crank," grinding out album after album of the same formula material. Instead, each of his efforts seems to eclipse the last. This, his latest work, may be his best to date. There is a sense of relaxation here which allows the music to flow freely. The organist and the instrument seem to be one music-making entity, in a sense of cooperation, with neither forcing the other into a predetermined mold. There is enough original material here to defy easy description; suffice it to say that it's some of the finest work of one of the musical giants of our time. What more is there to say?

There is another star on this recording besides Walt: his co-musicmaker, the organ itself. If you, as I am, are tired of contemporary "formula" instruments which, while excellent, are all basically clones of each other, here's a refreshing change. Some of the sounds are traditional Wurlitzer. Others aren't quite identifiable . . . and, boy, do I like that! The amount of music this organ makes, with subtleties you perhaps haven't heard before, will bring a smile to your face, not to mention satisfaction to your psyche.

A final word about the technical quality of the recording: superb! In a time when some CDs sound as if they were recorded in 1950, it's refreshing to experience a cassette which exploits state-of-the-art fidelity. The 32' Diaphone will rattle your dishes, and the crisp highs are as all recordings ought to be. Add to that the acoustic ambience which only comes from an organ in a nice old theatre, and you have a pretty tasty package.

David L. Junchen

BITS, BYTES & PIPES, VOLUME II: Jonas Nordwall at the 4/47 Wurlitzer. CD available from Organ Grinder Recordings, 5015 S.E. 82nd Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97266. \$20.00 postpaid; \$22.00 International.

It may seem a bit redundant to review a recording that has already been reviewed in these pages; however, that review was of the audio cassette, and there is just no comparison between that and the compact disc so it warrants a second look. In the first place, the dynamic range of the CD is dramatically different and much better than the audio

cassette; the frequency response and the dynamics are more normal. Then there is the factor of time; there are a number of selections on the CD which are not on the cassette because of time limitation.

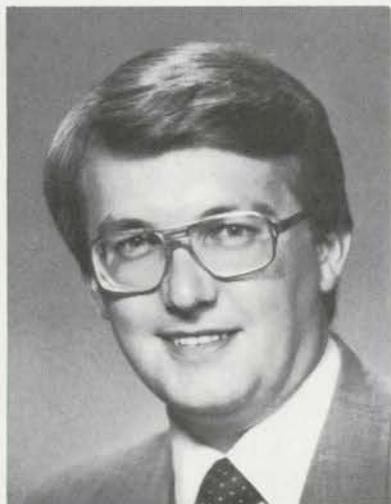
What makes this a difficult task to review is that the whole project is so overwhelming. I mean that in a musical sense, and in just sheer volume and quantity of sound because of the size of the room and the placement of the organ shutters and the unenclosed percussions. It would be a nightmare for me to try to start from scratch and make a recording. I'm sure that many hours of thought, sweat and experimentation went into this project. For sheer quantity, there is so much organ on this recording that those who like sheer quantity will just be bowled over, and I think the audiophiles will like all the heavy, 32-foot, rumbly bass which is recorded so beautifully on this disc. There is a bit too much bass for me, personally, but there are those who really like to turn up the sub-woofers and let the roof rattle and the windows crack. The audiophiles will have a field day with this. It is quite an achievement in an audio sense. Difficult though it may be to record this organ because of the proximity of the unenclosed percussions, I think a wonderful compromise was reached. There are a few too many percussions used, for my personal taste, in a musical way; however, they will be manna from heaven for the audiophile. There were some percussions that I missed hearing, e.g., the big scale tower chimes which are beautiful, the pretty little Wurlitzer Vibraharp and the tuned Wurlitzer Brass Bells. I cannot carp too much, because there is just so much there to use that it is difficult to crowd everything onto one disc.

Because I knew Dennis Hedberg in the years when he was custodian of the Portland Oriental Theatre three-manual Wurlitzer, it has been personally rewarding to me to see this man mature both personally and professionally. I have been interested in Dennis's dream for the organ. When the theatre closed, he was fortunate to buy the organ and to put it away and save it for professional use. I think it is wonderful that he has realized his dream in such an imaginative and capable way. This is truly a unique organ! It is, of course, many times larger than the original, but that Oriental nucleus makes itself heard and felt in the present scheme.

As for the selections, I'm afraid Duke Ellington doesn't come off very well in this instance. I fail to see why the first selection ("Don't Get Around Much Anymore") is played as a ballad, and I fail, also, to see why one would play the closing number ("It Don't Mean A Thing") and leave out the Doo-Wah-Doo Wah. To use xylophones and marimbas and



Walt Strony



Jonas Nordwall

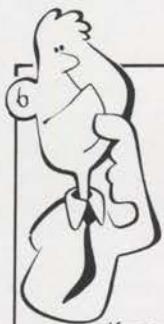
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other hardware in place of the Doo-Wah is almost unforgivable. The piece, however, does roll along in a rhythmic way and is different, to say the least. I was gratified to hear the Tubas and/or Trumpets used as an eight-foot Solo stop, this time without the ubiquitous four-foot Tibia (I have grown weary of this mandatory registration), and it was refreshing to hear these stops in their clarity and individuality. I would like to have heard more Vox Humana with some of the Tibia combinations, but then everyone knows that I am a Tibia and Vox man, first, last and always. I didn't hear much Vox Humana except, perhaps, with some soft string combinations. I also missed some of the exquisite color reeds, such as Musette, Orchestral Oboe and Kinura. The Saxophone makes itself heard peeking through the mist, but I would like to have heard a bit more of selective and varied registration.

Another thing I carp about is the total lack of *rubato* in "Poupee Valsette." This should be a very dainty, delicate selection, but is wooden, to say the least, in this rendering. I carp heartily about the use of *rubato* in the "Dance of the Comedians." This is inexcusable. The piece should begin at a jolly clip and continue to almost its very end without the slightest deviation in tempo.

If I carp, I ask that my thoughts and comments be considered to be constructive. No one knows better than I how difficult it is to undertake a project like this. Trying to play the organ in the wee, small hours of the morning doesn't always result in the most vital performances. It is rough on the engineer, and it is rough on the organ tuner. How well I know. Overall, I would say that this is a job well done, and it will please many organ enthusiasts and audiophiles.

George Wright



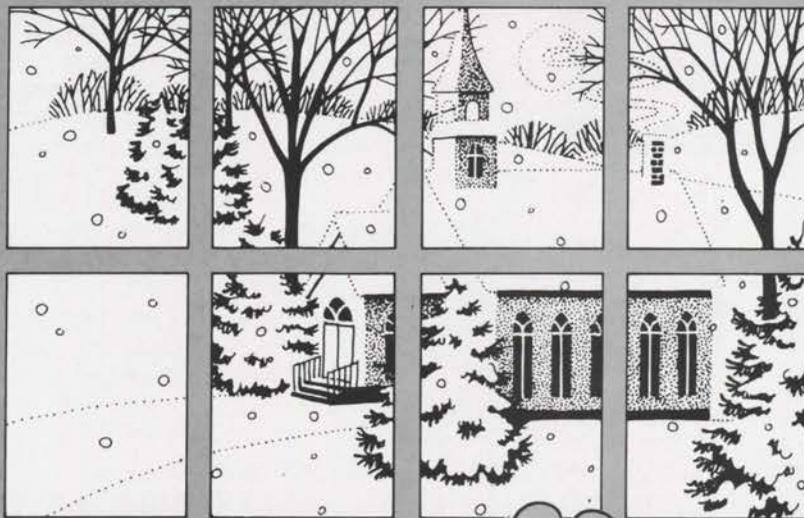
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