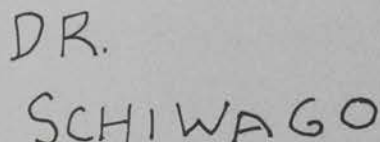


It's In The Cards

by Johnny Harris

On March 27, 1987, the doors of Phoenix's Organ Stop Pizza Restaurant were closed forever. Organ Stop, as Phoenixians came to call it, was a unique place to be entertained. World-class organists were engaged to play the spectacular Wurlitzer, complete with all the bells, horns, drums, cymbals, and other accessories. The pizza was acclaimed to be the best in Arizona. One of the Phoenix newspapers sang praises to Organ Stop Pizza for being a place of entertainment for all ages.

I was fortunate to have been a small part of Organ Stop history; for nearly five of my most treasured years, I was privileged to perform on her Mighty Wurlitzer when Maestros Walter Strony and Lew Williams were offering their talents elsewhere.



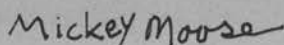
DR.
SCHIWAGO

We provided 3x5 manila cards for guests to write their musical desires to the organist. I kept some of the cards that came my way, and mean no one any embarrassment by presenting them here. I have taken great pains to keep the punctuations, capitalization, and spelling intact, exactly as the cards arrived on the request table. They make fun reading.

Requests were somewhat predictable; *guaranteed* were those for "Spanish Eyes," "Alley Cat," and "I Left My Heart in San Francisco." One tune that took particular abuse was the ever weary "Somewhere My Love," also known as "The Theme from Dr. Zhivago," and "Lara's Theme." Occasionally someone would buck the card system and thoughtlessly yank on the organist's coat tails while forcefully demanding to hear "Somewhere M'Luhv." But the cards were wonderful: "Somehow My Love," "the Theme from Dr. Chivaggio" (real close), "Dr. Shiwago," and "Laura's Song from Dr. Schavagho" all found their way to the console. (In keeping with the program, I once requested Lew to play "Larry's Song from Dr. Chicago." He got even with me by *playing* it!)

How I must have disappointed the classical music buff who requested "Phantom of the Oprea." And another who turned a "fugue" by Johann Sebastian Bach into a piece of candy; he wished to hear me play "Toccatta and Fudge in D minor by Bach."

"You can't always get what you want," appeared on a card, and I'm not sure whether that one was an editorial comment or a desire to hear that old Rolling Stones' tune that was a part of the movie called *The Big Chill*, but it proved to be true in the above examples.



Mickey Moose

Most TV shows and movies have themes, but one Wurlitzer enthusiast wanted me to play the "Muppet show anthem" for her. Another requester wanted the "Theme of the Muphet Show." Still another cartoon fan asked to hear "Popey." (I took a break and gulped down a can of spinach before I tackled that one...)

I have a card that solicited "The Them of Big Ben the clock."

"To little Lovers siten in a tree" was asked for by a young listener.

Spelling, obviously, is what makes these cards so precious. Consider the pizza lover who requested, all in lower case, "yancydodal." Another young Civil War fan called it "yanki Doodel Went to town." And from the rebel side came a card requesting, "I Wish I Were in the Land of Cotton," the requester even correcting the grammar (*were*) in the original lyric.

Meredith Willson wrote "Lida Rose" for Barbara Cook and the Buffalo Bills to sing in his great show, *The Music Man*. One of our Organ Stop patrons, however, suggested ol' Rosie might enjoy a beer; the card read "Lite A Rose. Thank you."

"The Parade of the Wooden Soldiers" became "Pray to the Wooden Soliders" when Lucille asked me to play it for her.

"Dalis" was once requested.

"This old man he played nick nack on my ne" appeared one time.

"Our father wich ourt in heaven" was a long way around to request the Lord's Prayer.

The haunting "Nadia's Theme" was transformed to "Noteus thema" (for which I *think* there is now a cure).

I'm not sure what "Little play matte" might be.

In teeny-tiny letters and all one word, came a desire to hear "Westminichure-overtur."

My Atari computer translated "an most Paridiest" to "Almost Paradise."

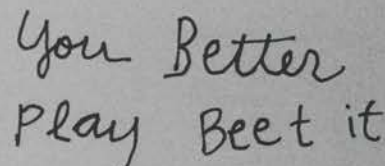
The theme from *Chariots of Fire* was requested one evening as "Cherry its a Fire." About an hour later, the requester took another stab at it with "Cherry its of fire."

"I came all the way from Wichita, Kansas," explained Susan. "If you can please play New York, New York again. Great place!" (Thanks, Susan, and you were right!)

As mighty as the Wurlitzer is, it is *not* universally suited to all musical styles. We took a certain amount of flack from some of the more progressive pizza patrons who wished to consume their repast while the big box of whistles played "Erotic City by: Prince," "Fat Boys Jail House Rap," "The Purple People Eater"...

AND

"You Cant Holler Down My Rainburro". "We arn't gona take it By testid sisters," "Louie Louie," and "Great Balls of Fire by Elvis Presley." (I wonder how Jerry Lee Lewis, who wrote this "classic," would feel about that?!)



You Better
Play Beet it

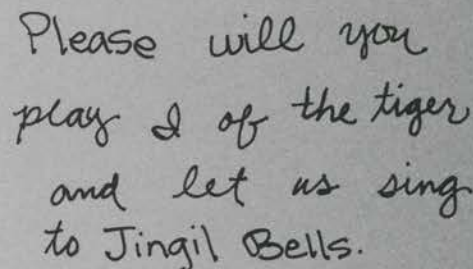
"You Better play Beet it," admonished a young hand, while another told me that "You better get with it and play some Michael Jackson, you igorant old man."

We would ask our audiences to inform us of any special occasion and the name of whomever was celebrating. Birthdays and anniversaries were the norm.

"I'm celebrating the second anniversary of my fourth divorce. Please play 'It's Been a Long Long Time'."

The old Yiddish "Havah Nagilah" acquired a new, fresh appearance with a card that read, "Play Halva Ta Kee La (guessing at spelling) for our daughter Roberta going back to Mich., from Spring Break Thank You."

A favorite card in my collection reads, "It's our parents' 19th anniversary, but they're not here. We were wondering if you would play the "Entertainer" for us because that's their favorite organ song. Thanks. Kids."



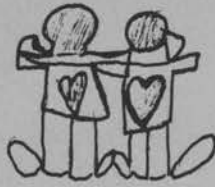
Please will you
play I of the tiger
and let us sing
to Jingil Bells.

Try interpreting *this* one on the spur of the moment: "Do you do Night Train? We have 10 tables of railroad enthusiasts! Ferro-equinologists we are." (It took me awhile, too. *Ferro-iron, equine-horse* . . . I've GOT it, Babe!)

Lyn Larsen created the popularity of the restaurants' most-requested selection, the "Chatanooga Choo-choo." It was exciting to hear the organ imitate the sounds of an old steam engine, bell clanging, whistle and horn blowing as it pulled away from the station, wheels slipping on the shiny tracks, then digging in as the train gained speed . . . *this* was a real production number! Request cards were never necessary because we just automatically played it several times a night. But the cards came!

One conveyed a mock "guilt trip" with this message: "We traveled all the way from Northwest Pheonix through rush-hour traffic, sleet, rain, snow, the works — just to hear you play — [in green ink, now] Chattanooga Choo Choo." Some other examples: "The Train Song," "Shadanogah shoe-shoo," and "Chanta nag Choo."

Side By side



I'd bet that a certain meat packer would be impressed by the requests I got for the little tunes that were incorporated in their hot dog commercials. One card even ordered "Variations of Oscar Meyer Wiener." (*Variations* yet!)

"Take Me Out to the Ball Park," was one fan's fancy.

The ever popular ragtime piano favorite "Twelfth Street Rag" became "Twelve Strait rags" at the hands of another fan.

"It's a good ship Lille pop," would certainly have pleased Shirley Temple.

Many of the requests conjured up some very comical images. Picture the United States Army Special Forces troops piling out of giant C-130's over the drop zones of Fort Bragg, bayonets fixed, and ammo belts over their fluffy pink tu-tus as I answer a request for the "Ballet of the Green Berets."

One junior pipe organ fan asked to hear "I'm a littel smell skunk." Other livestock melodies include "My Bunny lies over the ocean," and "Ellie cat." Let's throw in "whiny the Poh," "I of the tiger," "Ruboff" (The Red-Nosed Raindeer, I think), and a couple of horse lovers requested "Goash Riders in the Sky" and "shil be cumen rownd the mowtin."

STRIPPER



Sara and Nicole sent me a picture of a very tiny globe, complete with the outline of North America. It's not hard to guess that two little girls wished to hear "It's a Small World." They later sent me a card full of stars and stripes, the request being obvious for the J.P. Sousa classic. A third card contained a drawing of a basketball in motion and called for "Sweet Georgia Brown."

Bill Brown always took pride in his employees, and the crew at Organ Stop Phoenix was extraordinary. It was during a relatively slow evening when the gang behind the counters, wearying of "Somewhere m'Love" and "Alleycat," sent me some special requests of their own. Eight cards were delivered, and I could not answer a single one of them; these kids

had penned their desires in Rumanian, Russian, German, French, Spanish, Chinese (or maybe Korean or Japanese), and one that was a series of hastily-drawn icons.

Then-17-year-old Terry Cunningham, one of the staffers and an up-and-coming organist who did an occasional guest shot on the Wurlitzer, wrote, "How 'bout that Ancient Samaritan Sacrificing Music you played the other night?"

The Wurlitzer at Organ Stop Pheonix was enhanced by several "toys" not included in the textbook theatre organ installation. There were a bubble machine, revolving police lights, a slow-spinning mirror ball, and an array of four fluffy little birds that would dance in time with the music. Sing-alongs were an hourly staple, and the audience was prompted with the song lyrics projected on a screen that descended from the ceiling above the console. It was common to get a request to use the "special effects," such as the card that I received soliciting "a Song whith the Popits."

"We have a 38 old little boy with us that wants to see the puppets dance, read another.

Some of the cards I received are difficult to categorize, so I present them here for your perusal.

"Dear Johnny Harris, Please, if you have time play Foundapeant or Glory, Glory Hallauligaha. love, Amy."

I was given a choice on this card: "Roll Out the Barrell &/or Beer Barrell Polka." No matter how ya spell it, fella, these titles are for the same song!

"the sting, James Bond, Happy Birthday, What ever you Know," were the desires of a young fan.

"Please play this song for my sick brother." There was no song title mentioned on this card . . .

Mr. Organ
Would you play
Stop the begun.

So my memory is where Organ Stop lives now, and my souvenirs of a beautiful era include one of the picnic tables, my white-on-orange name plate that hung over the organ console on the nights I played there, a pair of navy blue jogging shorts that have "Organ Stop Pizza" silk-screened over the left leg, three or four souvenir sun-shades in various colors, a dozen OSP t-shirts, half a million highly-enviable friendships that evolved from the countless hours I spent at OSP both as spectator and as performer, and this stack of giggles written on little yellow cards that will always help me to remember that I was a part of something truly wonderful.

Ho ol Sliver
away

Another of Organ Stop's traditions was a Larsen origination that made this adaptation of Rossini's "William Tell Overture" a most-popular theatre organ favorite. It is more commonly known as "The Lone Ranger," but cards order this selection as "The Long Ranger," "The Lone Wrangler," and my favorite, "Ho ol Sliver away."

Also, anyone would've enjoyed Madonna's ever-popular "Like a Virger" (another young'un corrected it to "Vergen"), "Spashdance," "The Star Spangle Baner," (also submitted as "The Star Spaingeld banner"), and "Peter Piper Picked a Peck of Pickeld Peppers" (I did not know that anyone had made a song out of *that*, and can only guess that it's by Bruce Springsteen).

Let's recognize "Turkey and the Star," "Casey Gones," "I Ain't got Nobodody," "God blees na Amarica," "My Mommy is a Baker," Neil Diamond's ever-popular "Hellow," and that old theatre organ classic, "Don't touch my toot toot."

Richard Rodgers' immortal classic "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue" got relocated to 5th Avenue by a pizza popper, and became a work of George Gershwin's in the process.

One young'un asked for "Things That I Like." ("My Favorite Things" from the *Sound of Music*, maybe?)