



CALIFORNIA, HERE I COME: Simon Gledhill playing the Castro Theatre Wurlitzer. Order CD \$18 plus \$2 packing/shipping; cassette \$12 plus \$2 packing/shipping from T-V Recording, Box 70021, Sunnyvale, CA 94088.

I first met Simon Gledhill during one of my English concert tours in the mid-1980s. At the time he was in his late teens and was already showing great promise as a musician. It was a breath of fresh air to hear this young British organist play in a musical style that was sympathetic to both the music and the instrument. Too many young British organists were trying to emulate the "Blackpool" style which, when taken out of its dancehall context, reduces the theatre organ to band organ status.

Today, Simon's musical maturity far surpasses his young age, and he continues to grow. I'm proud to say that Simon is already "right up there" with today's top theatre organists. To his credit, Simon has chosen NOT to copy another organist's style "note for note." Instead, his playing shows many influences. In the process of "repackaging" all the ideas he has heard, he has developed a natural-sounding style. I predict that, in the future, his sound will become even more individual.

A famous concert manager once said that she "would never represent an organist until he became 30 years old." Her reason was that maturity doesn't really start to settle in until the third decade. If this is the case, one can only imagine the growth that we will hear from Simon in the coming years. He is only 25 years old now!

The organ at the Castro Theatre in San Francisco is famous for its well-blended ensemble which is due to three factors: excellent pipework, expert tonal finishing, and much better than average theatre acoustics. My only negative comments about this organ concert are the English Horn and the Solo Tibia. The English Horn has a strange color, and the Solo Tibia could

use some "sex." Of course, these points are subjective. Having said that, the Castro Wurlitzer is one of the hottest sounds around. It's obvious that much time has been devoted to tonal finishing. The ensemble combinations (especially mezzoforte) are to die for! My personal congratulations to Ed Stout and to the Taylor family.

The first recording of the Castro is an excellent representation of the "Castro sound." It sounds as if you're right in the middle of the auditorium.

Simon is certainly at his best. He makes full use of the instrument. His registrations are sophisticated, but always understated. His phrasing is very lyrical, and the music is full of feeling.

At the beginning of this review, I said that Simon is sympathetic to the instrument. This is a gift that few theatre organ performers have. Let me explain. Each instrument has its own "schtick," as it were, and it's up to the performer to analyze what the instrument does best and to use its resources accordingly. A registration that works well on one instrument does not work well on all other instruments. A blatant example of this are some of the "English" registrations that use tibias and mutations without tremulants. Most modern American theatre organs are tonally finished to play lyrical music. The tibia trebles are softened to blend in with a lush ensemble, and the regulators are set up to achieve a heavy, singing tremulant. English instruments are set up with much brighter trebles, and the tremulant is not as "lyrical" as we have come to expect.

I have heard many performers try to play English registrations on American style organs. It doesn't always work. The trebles are weak; tuning is sometimes a problem, and the regulators are very unsteady when the tibia is played without a tremulant. This is an unsympathetic use of the organ.

This is not the case with Simon. Even when he is playing one of those wonderful British novelty pieces, he uses sounds that are appropriate to that instrument. His "Ace of Clubs" is a good (and well played) example. Each selection on this recording exhibits this same sympathetic approach.

There are 13 selections (three of them are medleys), and each of them is a gem. The liner notes contain photos of the theatre interior, organ chambers, and Simon. Unfortunately, there are no times listed.

Congratulations, Simon! All fans of quality theatre organ will love this one.

Walter Strony

Manufacturers, distributors or individuals sponsoring or merchandising organ recordings are encouraged to send review copies to the Record Reviewer, THEATRE ORGAN, 4633 S.E. Brookside Drive, #58, Milwaukie, Oregon 97222. Be sure to include purchasing information (postpaid price, ordering address) and a photo of the artist which need not be returned.

IN THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY. Nicholas Martin at the 3/19 Wurlitzer of Turner's Musical Merry-Go-Round. Available from: Flynndale Musical Enterprises, 11 Horseshoe Dr., Etching Hill, Rugeley, Staffordshire, WS15 2RF, England. Price \$14.00 postpaid airmail. Since there are 49 tunes, in medley form, here is a small selection of some of the tunes included: Sally, Jealousy, Rose of Tralee, "Till, The Desert Song, Copacabana, Please, Strangers In The Night, Roses of Picardy, April Love, Answer Me.

ORGAN: EXCELLENT

PERFORMANCE:

Blackpool Style Dance Medley

RECORDING: CLEAN

This is truly a strict tempo dance medley tape. Being what it is, it is quite well done.

This particular organ is nicely finished, and sounds well in the room. It is difficult to tell whether or not there is added reverb, it is so well done that it would render it a moot point. A very well-done recording.

Bob Shafter

A PARAMOUNT FAREWELL. 9 artists say farewell to the Paramount Odeon, Manchester. Available from: The Organ Literature Foundation, 45 Norfolk Rd., Braintree MA 02184-5915. Price \$12.00 plus \$2.00 per order postage. Since this is a somewhat unique recording, artists will be listed rather than tunes. They are: Doreen Chadwick, Reginald Liversidge, Eric Lord, Nigel Ogden, Robin Richmond, Hubert Selby, David Shepherd, Ron Stuart, and Ronnie Wood.

ORGAN: EXCELLENT

PERFORMANCES: VARIED (of course)

RECORDING: A LITTLE MUFFLED

This is the original home of the organ that ended up in the Manchester Free Trade Hall. Because it is such a fabulous organ in its new home, I found it very interesting to hear it on this recording. It is a wonderful instrument in its original home as well.

It would be unfair, and perhaps take up too much space, to critique each performer. Nigel Ogden and David Shepherd do stand out, however.

I believe the muffled qualities of this recording were a result of the desire to capture the room acoustics to their fullest. Since this was a 3000-seat theatre there is a huge acoustical environment to capture. The only real objection I have to this recording is the voice-over narration. While it is done in respectful, almost reverent tones, I felt the information conveyed could have been better done on the printed page.

This recording has much to commend it, especially from an historical point of view.

Bob Shafter

THEATRE ORGAN

Letter To The Record Reviewer:

Dear Record Reviewer:

I always enjoy reading the interesting and informative record reviews in THE-ATRE ORGAN, and would like to pay tribute to the variety of reviewers who have helped me to build my own record collection over the years.

However, as producer of "Reflections," Bryan Rodwell's recording reviewed in the November/December 1990 issue, I wonder if I might be permitted to correct one or two inaccurate statements given in your comments.

You refer to what you regard as some unacceptable aspects of Bryan's playing and suggest that these can be explained by his "... having been a keyboard artist for the past many years." In fact, Bryan has been a professional theatre organist for around 40 years and, apart from a short period in the '60s to '70s, he has been a regular theatre pipe organ performer all this time.

Now to the characteristics which are criticised: You state that the fast numbers are "played left-hand bass — no pedals." Listen again, Bob! All those intricate bass lines are genuinely pedaled. I can understand your misapprehension — there are

few organists who can keep an eight-to-the-bar line going in the way Bryan does in some numbers: it's something that has to be seen to be believed! How one could think Bryan could do that with his left hand while so much else is going on, I can't imagine: he's only got two hands, and there is no multi-tracking.

You also state that the fast numbers are "... very, very fast," and single out "Cherokee" as being "... so fast that it is out of control." On this recording, Bryan uses a tempo of about 112 beats per minute, which is no more than the tempo indicated on the printed copy. I have re-listened to this track carefully, and I can find no place where he loses control. Maybe it sounds fast because of the exciting, jazzy improvisations — but that's the joy of Bryan's playing.

Sincerely,
John Leeming
London, England

Response to John Leeming's letter:

I stand corrected and as soon as I can wipe the egg off my face I'd like to make a few comments. There. When I originally reviewed this particular piece ("Cherokee"), I went looking to the bio material in the liner notes to find a possible explanation for the way it turned out. To say that I

personally did not like the arrangement would be the tiniest of understatement. At Mr. Leeming's suggestion I did go back and listen to this particular piece several times, and I could still find no socially redeeming qualities. I'm sure this sort of playing must be quite something to watch, but it is not always exactly precise. In my opinion it is definitely overwrought, and out of control.

As a footnote, I have always had the highest regard for John Leeming's work.
Bob Shafter



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