

For The Records



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SOUND OF SILENTS, Lee Erwin playing the "Fox-Capitol" Theatre Wurlitzer Pipe Organ. Angel No. (stereo) S-36073. Available at record dealers. Price not stated.

There are several reasons for rejoicing here, one being the release of an organ record by a major record company. True, Angel is a small "major" but it is known for quality, both in musical content and recording technique. During the '50s and early '60s nearly all majors released theatre organ recordings; they were so good for demonstrating "hi-fi" and "stereo." But it all stopped suddenly perhaps seven years ago and small producers have filled the gap ever since. Now Angel has re-broken the ice. Let's hope other majors follow.

This collection of scores for silent film classics brings together a sampling of Lee Erwin's finest work. All but two of the selections are originals. "Diane" and "Charmaine" have been included because it would be unthinkable to cue *What Price Glory* and *Seventh Heaven* without them. All of the rest are products of Lee's fertile imagination. Because "Diane" and "Charmaine" have been recorded many times before, Lee has prepared

subtle and different arrangements — done them to a turn, so to speak. Many of us have been exposed to Lee's fine scores for *Queen Kelly* and *The Eagle* via live performances or previous recording; the music is presented here in somewhat compact form, a synthesis of the best musical moments from both films. It's fine and sensitive music. So are the highlights from Lee's *My Best Girl* score. Music for *The General* is okay but the presentation is somewhat diminished by the mooged-in and unconvincing train sounds (plus the organ's whistle).

Wings is a movie which cries out for such World War I tunes as "Over There," "Hinky-Dinky Parlez-vous," "Long Long Trail," and perhaps "My Buddy" and "Just a Baby's Prayer at Twilight" (for her daddy over there) — the old familiar chestnuts. This poses a problem to the cuer; no matter how appropriate the new original music may be, the old standbys will be missed. Having seen the original presentation of *Wings* in 1927 and very recently a WWI tune-studded score played by Bill Field during a *Wings* presentation at the Field-Coffman Old Town Music Hall in El Segundo, Calif., we find it difficult to warm up to Lee's exceptionally fine music in connection with *Wings*. Perhaps this music should be covered by a reviewer who's memory doesn't go back as far as the "big event." Anyway, it's easy music to listen to. But Lee, wasn't that Fokker actually a Gotha?



Dick Kline
(Stufotal)

It isn't often that scoring of the same film by two skilled artists is available on records. Score highlights for *Thief of Bagdad* and *Phantom of the Opera* have now been recorded both by Lee Erwin and Gaylord Carter ("50 Years of Chasing," Malar No. MAS-2019). Comparison reveals that Erwin and Carter have entirely different approaches to accompanying the same silent film. Erwin composes his cues while Carter prefers to improvise around principal themes selected from the classical field, old pops, standards and the vast library of cue music written for the movies. Both systems were used during the Golden Era; both have advantages and drawbacks. The



Lee Erwin at the "Fox-Capitol" console. The promotional opportunity was not "de-Klined."

scenes which both organists have selected to highlight also reveal much about their conceptions of their tasks. Carter prefers the literal or direct approach, hit the nail on the head and the devil with subtlety. For example, Carter chose to depict the falling chandelier in *Phantom* in his excerpt and does so with a mighty crash. Erwin usually shuns the "effect cue" approach, preferring to supply music which sets the mood for the scene, rather like sneaking up on a scene and engulfing it with music which suggests the mood or action rather than depicting it literally. This system works very well for films involving fantasy, such as *Thief of Bagdad* and doesn't do badly by the *Phantom*. In terms of classical composers, Carter might be classed as an exponent of Richard Wagner, while Erwin's work resembles more the style of Claude Debussy.

Both of Erwin's scores (*Thief* and *Phantom*) maintain interest as music independent of the films they illustrate, which cannot be claimed for too many film scores unless they are re-worked as concert arrangements.

The organ is Dick Kline's 4/28 studio Wurlitzer, despite Angel's devious attempt to locate a part of it in the "Fox Capitol" theatre — probably for promotional reasons.

Recording is technically excellent, the organ sounds great and profuse jacket notes cover the Lee Erwin career from long before he traipsed "down the valley of a thousand yesterdays" to "Moon River".

In closing we would like to state that, to us, Lee's music for Valentino's *The Eagle* is just about the sexiest score ever written. "Rudi" would approve.

LEN RAWLE GOES NORTH (4/14 Gaumont Manchester and 4/20 Odeon Manchester Wurlitzers). Acorn (stereo) CF 245 (4 sides). This product of the British Lancastrian Theatre Organ Trust is available, by special arrangement, from Doric Records, Box 605, Alamo, Calif. The 2-record set is \$10.95 postpaid.

For those who failed to catch Len Rawle during his recent US tour, this recording will do much to make up for the missed opportunity. Indeed it is a study in contrasts; there are sublime moments and ludicrous ones, but there's no faltering in the entertain-



Len Rawle
(Harold Photo)

ment value throughout, and that was obviously Len's goal.

We can't agree with jacket note writer John Potter when he pictures the young Welshman as a sort of "wave of the future" example of the younger generation. For the most part Len Rawle's playing is kind to the ears of veteran enthusiasts; there is nothing "way out" nor even "moderately out" during the 30 pops and standards heard on these two records. In some cases there is even borrowing from the older generation e.g. George Wright's "sneer effect" ("If I Had You," "Birth of the Blues"), and Wright's "wolf whistle" ("Love is the Sweetest Thing," "When I Take My Sugar to Tea"), even an entire George Wright recorded arrangement ("Brazil"), all of which have got to be nearly 20 years old. Len went even farther back (circa 1940 and Ethel Smith) to dredge up that abomination called the "schmear," or unfingered glissando ("Somebody Stole My Gal," "Varsity Drag," "I Love Paris," "S'Wonderful"). That sophomoric device we could do without, especially on pipes. Yet, Len is quite capable of performing smooth fingered "rolls" ("I Could Write a Book"). There are also a few anxious moments with somewhat disturbing harmony ("September in the Rain," "Chapel in the Moonlight"), but they are fleeting. So much for the complaint department.

The plus side is far more encompassing. Len's use of the Post Horn is just right. He avoids extended masses of chords on it and uses it most effectively as a contrasting "riff" instrument ("Everything's in Rhythm," "Strolling," "Dizzy Fingers").

There is lots of registration variety throughout (don't forget two organs

were used). For "Soldier in the Park," Len comes up with a convincing fife and drum band. There's Latin excitement in "Eleonora," and naturally the Wurlitzer's pizzicato effect helps out during "Pizzicato Polka." Len provides a brass band for "Washington Post" (definitely not intended as a political comment for the "colonies!") and "Liberty Bell" marches.

Some selections are exquisite. Len's "Forgotten Dreams" captures the long ago, half forgotten aura of Leroy Anderson's piece via sensitive playing and almost ethereal registration. Our favorite is "I Could Write a Book" which includes a lovely arrangement subtle registration, and understated playing. "I Love Paris" is of the same genre. Khachaturian's "Onedin Line" theme is also top quality in all respects. Other tunes heard include "Have You Ever Been Lonely," "You Were Meant for Me," "No Business Like Show Business," "People," a seductive "Perfidia," "Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen" and more yet.

The Odeon and Gaumont organs have been described many times in these pages. Although other records are "in the can" for later release, these tunes are the last out before the Odeon Wurlitzer was removed and the Gaumont disconnected during a theatre redecoration; future undecided. Both instruments were in top form for their final grooving thanks to TLC by the Trust (which has found a home for the larger organ, using funds gathered from the sale of these Trust recordings).

We see a bright future for Len Rawle. He's in the process of developing a style of his own, then there'll be no need to borrow from other organists, good or awful.

As always the Trust's recording is technically excellent. John Potter's notes provide information about the organist, who is shown at both consoles in color photos. In all, it's a worthwhile entertainment package.

