

**NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2003 • AUDIO, VIDEO AND BOOK REVIEWS**

## For the Records

Ralph Beaudry, Associate Editor Compact discs, cassettes, videos and books to be reviewed should be sent to Ralph Beaudry, 5155 N. Fresno Street, Apt. 170, Fresno, CA 93710-6838. Please be aware items must be received three months prior to the issue date in which the review will appear. Information telephone 559/222-0239.

The title of this newest CD of the magnificent 4/42 Möller theatre organ in the opulent, exotic 4,600-seat Fox Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia is more appropriate than it might seem at first glance! For the simple reason that, in addition to the usual CD recording, there is a second disc included. The second disc is a DVD—with both video and sound—the likes of which we have never encountered before! It is not a video of organist Larry Embury playing the Möller's massive gilt console nor is it like Walt Disney's acclaimed *Fantasia*. It can be best described as a constantly changing, subtle, colorful light show in which unique designs are beautifully choreographed to popular music. To help explain this unusual, fascinating, visual light show we'll quote from the excellent, detailed liner notes which accompany this first-of-a-kind album.

"The cascading visuals on the DVD Video, designed by Marshall Yaeger, are digital realizations of images created by the Kaleidoplex™. This patented kaleidoscope projector was invented in the 1970s for Virgil Fox's touring show 'Heavy Organ.' Projecting Kaleidoscopic images through a kaleidoscope projector, it was the first new development in projecting images since the 1920s.... These vastly complex, yet round, colorful, and harmoniously symmetrical 'mandalas' have now been digitized, which greatly enhances the control and accuracy of the images that rhythmically accompany music. They have been artfully placed in a 16.0 wide screen format for home theatre systems, allowing the content of the surrounding art to metamorphose into the moving, pulsating, constantly changing central images."

Although we'll concentrate on the music being played rather than the unusual visuals, the 12 pages of full color liner notes briefly describe each of the fascinating designs which accompany the 14 tracks of music on this 59-minute album. The notes also have a drawing of this unique projector and complete details about how this combination of sight and sound was produced. We must note once more that there are TWO discs. One (the DVD) contains both the pictures and music (in surround sound!) for those who have—or will be purchasing a home theatre system—while the audio-only CD will allow everyone with a CD player to fully enjoy the incredibly rich, all-encompassing sound of the "Mighty Mo."

The organ is one of only 12 theatre instruments built by the Möller Company; it's their Opus 5566 (installed in 1929) which is the second largest original installation theatre organ in the world—exceeded in size only by the Wurlitzer in New York's Radio City Music Hall. We know of only six previous recordings of the "Mighty Mo" and in reviewing the most recent CD—Bob Van Camps' *Atlanta Fox Theatre Remembered* (Journal, January 1998)—we commented about "...the awesome range and rich warmth of the organ and room...." Just over a year ago Larry Embury was appointed Artist in Residence at the Atlanta Fox Möller. But Larry is hardly a newcomer to theatre pipes. He's been a professional pianist and organist since his teenage years, studied with Richard Purvis, spent some years working and traveling for the Conn, Baldwin and Rodgers electronic organ firms, and in the late '70s was on the elite staff of organists playing the Wurlitzers in the Daly City and Redwood City Capn's Galley pizzerias. (It's of interest to note that Larry recently acquired the Redwood City 4/28 Wurlitzer and is having it restored!)

Larry's now completely at home in the Atlanta Fox which has an official policy of having the organ played for every event in this most successful of all performing arts centers in the country! When he isn't playing sing-alongs or intermissions at the Fox Larry plays a Steinway grand in the elegant Savoy Lounge of the Georgia Terrace Hotel just across Peachtree Street from the Fox. As an added musical bonus for these Sonic Bloom discs Larry decided to feature a magnificent 9' concert grand piano (in addition to the Möller's rather honkytonk 6' Baldwin grand) and several tracks also feature Neal Starkey on bass and Billy Degnats on drums! The "studio" Steinway,

bass and drums were recorded first and then Larry added the Möller’s voices. The recording perfectly combines these various sound sources and that adds another sparkling facet to this musical/visual delight.

Although most of Larry’s 14 selections are some of the most beautiful ballads ever written, the program opens with Cole Porter’s somewhat risqué “My Heart Belongs To Daddy” done in a mock-burlesque arrangement with a couple of bumps and grinds. The liner notes indicate this tune fits the personalities of Ethel Merman, Carol Channing, Marilyn Monroe, and Gypsy Rose Lee; however, it was actually introduced by a young, naïve Mary Martin in her 1938 Broadway debut! The Steinway grand plays the opening phrases of Gershwin’s toast to a lost love, “But Not For Me,” and then is joined by the lush Möller for a ravishing duet on the first chorus (note Larry’s remarkably smooth fingered runs) followed by the discrete bass and drums joining in on the second chorus. It’s worth noting here that many of Larry’s melodies have three or four choruses in which Larry has ample time to explore many of the Möller’s unusual solo ensembles.

“Fats” Waller himself introduced his best known song, “Ain’t Misbehavin,” in the 1929 musical review *Hot Chocolates* and, when Louis Armstrong joined the cast a month or so later, Armstrong reprised it as an intermission trumpet solo! Larry combines the piano and organ in a stride arrangement that would probably please “Fats” immensely as “Fats” always considered the piano as feeding his body while the organ fed his soul. Another Gershwin ballad is next—this is a nice emotional version of “Embraceable You.” While it’s probably just a coincidence that Larry has included both “But Not For Me” and “Embraceable You” on this album, both these songs were introduced by Ginger Rogers in 1930’s Broadway hit show *Girl Crazy*. Of course, that led to her fabulous silver screen career singing and dancing with Fred Astaire. When film musicals lost their charm, she switched to dramatic roles and won an Oscar for her performance in 1940’s *Kitty Foyle*. But, did you realize, that in 1964 she replaced Carol Channing in Broadway’s original production of *Hello, Dolly!* And then went on to take the starring role in the London version of Jerry Herman’s musical *Mame*. What a fabulous career Ginger Rogers had!

“Go Away Little Girl” is a relatively recent composition (1962) but it is a seductive ballad that receives a sophisticated treatment with the bass and drums joining in on the lush piano/organ arrangement. One of the bounciest numbers on the disc is next—it’s Con Conrad’s slightly sexy “You Got To See Mama Every Night (Or You Won’t See Mama At All!)” Although the liner notes indicate Hoagy Carmichael’s salute to the Peachtree State, “Georgia On My Mind,” dates to 1958, Hoagy actually composed and introduced this tune 28 years earlier and today it’s still a delightfully subtle swinger. Another sentimental favorite from the same era is next—“Willow Weep For Me.” Now, how about a wonderful George Shearing recreation to sparkle things up? Nothing could be better than having the piano, bass and drums joining the organ’s tuned percussions on “Lullaby Of Birdland.” It’s one of the best items on this disc and is followed by a haunting, refined organ solo of “Stella By Starlight.”

The next melody is a Beatles tune done up in completely baroque tremors-off trappings. Its title is “Yesterday” and it may surprise you to realize that many Beatles compositions adapt beautifully to a baroque treatment. In fact there is even a complete Naxos label CD titled *Beatles Go Baroque* (#8.555010) on which 20 Beatles tunes are played by a chamber orchestra in the styles of Handel, Vivaldi, Corelli and Bach! Two magnificent Richard Rodgers ballads are next. First is the exquisitely romantic “Where Or When” and then it’s the wistful “It Might As Well Be Spring.” Closing the program is an upbeat, jazzy version of “You Made Me Feel So Young.”

This first-ever disc featuring the fascinating, colorful, constantly evolving artistic displays complimenting the music of Larry Embury (and friends) comes not in the usual CD “jewel box” but in a 5" x7 1/2" hard plastic DVD box which contains the two discs and the 12 pages of liner notes. There is also a list of the organ’s ranks and chamber locations as well as full color photos of the majestic auditorium and the massive Möller console. The Möller, once again, is in magnificent voice thanks to the dedicated, loving care given it by long-time organ and theatre curator Joe Patton. This album is recommended as a most unique theatre organ experience and can be ordered for \$20.00 plus \$4.00 shipping and handling from [www.seemusicdvd.com](http://www.seemusicdvd.com) or by calling 1/800/486-6628. Mail orders may be addressed to Circles International, 20 West 64th Street #32P, New York, NY 10023-7138. (Additional information is available from Rika lino at 1/212/799-9300.)