

Alan Ashton's

ORGANised

Keyboards

'Vision' CD Album Review, written by Alan Ashton, re-produced in full with kind permission from MSS International Music Magazine (2005)

Back in issue 10 my opening comments on a new recording from Alex Payler were no doubt considered a little

harsh by some people, including perhaps the artist himself. Referring in general to artists failure to utilise the blank inner sleeves for self promotion, I'm more than delighted to report that on VISION (AP2005) Alex has not only made up for that, but has included a couple of photographic shots as well. Now we can all put a face to the undeniable talent of this young artist. **He is without doubt one of the most exciting players I have heard for a long while and I can't wait to see him live in concert.** Alex makes it clear in the sleeve notes that this is a 'carbon copy' of his 2005 concert programme and as such it is all performed without recourse to any over dubbing, sound modules, expanders and other gizmos. The instrument is the rare YAMAHA EL-900m, and I've only ever seen and heard one other artist with this model...and he's not bad either!

Of all the movie world production trade marks, the 20th CENTURY FOX FANFARE is the most dramatically recognisable, which is followed here by the STAR WARS theme which, strangely was the opening choice of his earlier CD, and I imagine the only reason for this re-working of the suspenseful John Williams composition, is all down to the current film emergence. FIELDS OF GOLD comes from the pen of Gordon Sumner, better known in pop world circles as the artist Sting. Originally appearing on his album Ten Summoner's Tales, it was written for the guitar and influenced by his walking through fields of barley near to his home. It is plaintive, if not a slightly repetitive

tune, and Alex certainly captures the peaceful mood to perfection.

It contrasts dramatically with the Nebraska born Neil Hefti's jazz standard SPLANKY. It was one of a number of tunes which he penned in his big band days with the likes of Charlie Barnet, Charlie Spivak, Woody Herman and Count Basie. Included on The Atomic Mr. Basie album, it quickly became a 'signature' piece, and **when you have the possibilities of the EL-900m at your disposal, why not exploit them to the full.**

Again, the mood of Alex Payler's ever changing programme changes to the work of another movie world musical giant...Ennio Morricone and his poignant music for The Mission, GABRIEL'S OBOE. **This too, like the earlier Sting track, is approached and played with artistic sensitivity.** Remaining in film land, there being no fewer than seven reasons to do so on this CD, the next track CIRCLE OF LIFE comes from the Disney's 32nd animated production The Lion King, the first production based on original source material, having been given the name change from The King Of the Jungle prior to going into production. This Tim Rice/ Elton John collaboration resulted in an Ivor Novello Award in 1994 for Best Song. Ravel's Bolero needs no introduction from me, although a word of warning would not be out of place. Whatever you do don't reach for the volume control, because the opening to this is version is infinitely quieter than any I have heard. **The finale, as expected, does not disappoint so make sure you have a speaker system that will do it, and all the tracks for that matter, justice.**

Following on from the JAMES BOND theme comes COLOURS OF THE WIND, which is from another Disney animated production Pocahontas. Slated by the critics it nevertheless drew box office crowds and saw Alan Menken, who wrote the score and the music, pick up an award. **An excellent Big Band arrangement of JEEPERS CREEPERS, complete with sparkling trumpets in solo and ensemble**

form, breath's life into this Harry Warren Classic, originally sung by Louis Armstrong to a horse in the 1938 Warner Brothers Film, Going Places. The French composer Leo Delibes is perhaps best known for his ballet Coppelia which he composed in 1870, but it makes a pleasant change to hear the lovely FLOWER DUET from his 1883 Opera Lakme. Boris (Lalo) Schifrin is another modern day composer responsible for more than 150 film and TV music scores ranging from The Beverly Hillbillies, via Roller Coaster, Magnum Force and of course MISSION IMPOSSIBLE. **This tense composition is one favoured by a lot of organists, and for many, despite their thoughts, they don't seem to be able to do it justice. Enter the frame Alex Payler who certainly does the reverse! Like so many tracks, this one has attitude...in fact the whole recording is a musical statement from a very talented young man. Any aspiring organ player living in his locale should count themselves fortunate that he teaches from his home equipped studio.**

The penultimate item is the Overture to the 1858 light opera ORPHEUS IN THE UNDERWORLD by Frenchman Jaques Offenbach, concluding with a very spirited version of the famous high kicking Can Can. The recording comes to an all too early ending with the Solfeiggieto by Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach, the third son of J.S.Bach. This quickly develops into the upbeat treatment that I always associate with the former Jacques Loussier Trio, who sprang to fame in the late 50's with their individual treatment of the works of J.S.Bach.

So to conclude—This really is an all round SUPER CD. I can't fault the production in any way. In the interim period from 1997 when he gained the Award as the National Electronic Organist of the year, Alex has continued to build on that experience, and this standard of playing must place him in the top 10 league of electronic organists.

