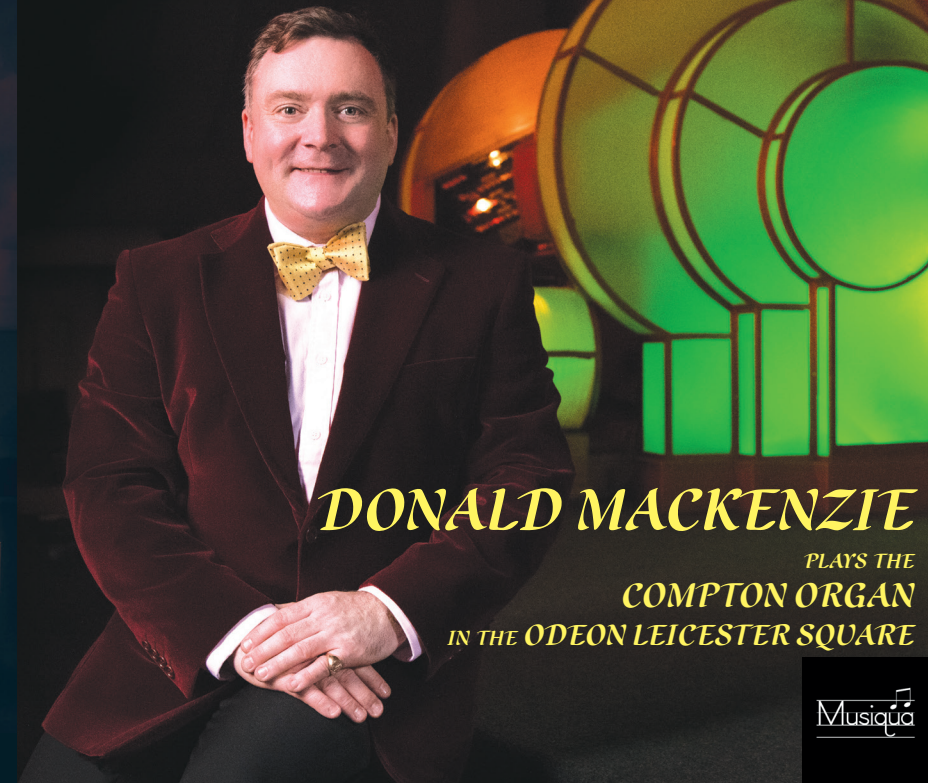




IT'S THE ODEON!



DONALD MACKENZIE

PLAYS THE
COMPTON ORGAN
IN THE ODEON LEICESTER SQUARE

Donald MacKenzie is a virtuoso of the organ. His solo playing is always tasteful, full of verve, historically sensitive and immaculately prepared - drawing on his very considerable knowledge of the vast repertoire of music in his own personal library. His rare blend of technical excellence, imagination and quick wit enables him to create improvised accompaniments to silent films that are the finest of their kind that I've heard anywhere.

As a mere singer, I haven't a clue how 'The Duchess' actually works. It's all magic to me! After all these years Donald knows this magnificent instrument inside out: from Clarinet to Contra Bombarde, Birdsong to Klaxon. More importantly, he applies his encyclopaedic knowledge to great musical effect. One of my greatest thrills was to share the stage with 'The Duchess' at a recent show, singing a selection of numbers from the musical 'Showboat' - with Donald's sensitive and stylish accompaniment - as a curtain-raiser to a screening of Buster Keaton's 'Steamboat Bill Jnr'.

This new recording is an irresistible listen, and proof that "Donald and the Duchess" is a musical match made in heaven.

Catherine Bott
FGS, HonFTL, Singer and Classic FM Presenter

Hello and a warm welcome to this CD featuring the sounds of the mighty cinema organ in the Odeon Leicester Square! The sounds of 'The Duchess' Compton organ have been entertaining cinema-goers since its opening on 2 November 1937. Today the cinema is a London landmark and is the home of glittering premières and gala film occasions. These are often adorned with the remarkable sound of the finest of John Compton's cinema (or theatre) organs. Where did the name 'The Duchess' come from, I hear you ask? Gerald Shaw organist between 1958 and 1974, affectionately referred to the Compton as 'The Duchess', and this name has lived on.

There have been only four resident organists over the years (although others have played on an occasional basis) and I have now been at the Odeon for 25 years - starting officially in November 1993. During this time I have played for countless World and Gala Premières, special events, silent films, concerts and opening weekends of new releases. This also includes Royal Film Performances in the presence of the Royal Family including several with Her Majesty The Queen. It has been a great honour and privilege for me to present the organ publicly and also to act as its curator.

The instrument is in 'original' condition and is recognised as being part of the cultural heritage of the Cinema in the UK. The sound is produced from over 1,500 pipes contained in the organ chambers, sited under the stage. In addition to this, there is a plethora of silent picture effects and tuned percussions - one might term these as the musical 'thuds and bangs', which you will hear on this recording. All the percussions are real instruments. Together with the pipework, they are controlled from the most impressive five-manual console. This rises into the audience's view with an uniquely designed Art Deco glass surround, which lights up in multi-coloured hues. On this recording, you will also hear the sound of the Compton 'Electrone' division, the Melotone. Musically, this is an early synthesiser and an acquired taste but 80 years ago it was 'state of the art' technology.

'The Duchess' is my favourite of all the organs I have played - there is 'no place like home'. The balance of the instrument is exceptional and entirely due to the vision of John Compton and his company.

Happy listening - enjoy the programme of music on this disc, where I showcase the aural splendour of the Compton organ in the UK's Premiere Cinema - The Odeon Leicester Square.

Donald MacKenzie - Organist

Acknowledgements

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The inside tray cover photograph shows the architectural splendour of the new Odeon in 1937. (DM Collection)

The programme commences with the signature tune Donald has used for many years, 'At the Odeon'. This is followed by a march by the second resident organist of the Odeon, John Howlett. Next the Duchess in a quieter mood with Forgotten Dreams. A jolly Rickshaw Ride through nearby Chinatown is reminiscent of the style of the third Odeon organist Gerald Shaw (complete with the orchestral gong).

Drury Lane calls for a quick tap at 42nd Street and then it's time to take to the skies of old London town in the company of Mary Poppins. Donald played for the World Première of 'Saving Mr Banks' in 2013 which was centred around the making of the Disney film. Another World Première memory follows and this Ivor Novello song was featured by Jeremy Northam in the 2001 film 'Gosford Park'.

'Waltzing in Song' brings in three well known tunes and then comes a barn-stormer of an arrangement of 'Sweet Sue' - remember this from 1959 film 'Some Like It Hot'? 'Transatlantic Lullaby' calms things down and then a delightful unfamiliar Portuguese Fado song, 'Grain of Rice'.

The 'Sixties Swing' selection, introduces three popular songs that are up-tempo and this is followed by a jazz improvisation on 'Ain't Misbehavin'' by Fats Waller. The lesser known novelty 'Sidewalk Serenade' was made famous by the Tornadoes (already featured on the recording with Telstar) and master of melody George Gershwin's works are showcased in a glittering West End selection.

'You Raise Me Up!' is a more modern song that is very popular and shows off the tonal gamut of the organ. Which brings us to the final selection of the disc, a musical tribute to George Formby - all very Blackpool! After the windows have been cleaned it's time for Donald to descend into the pit once again with his erstwhile signature tune. And here's the lyrics if you want to sing along!

*You like pictures, I like pictures, so it's pictures we're going to see!
We can hold hands in the darkness, and pretend Garbo's you and Clark Gable is me,
Everyone knows, everyone knows, where the best show in town is on,
So let's step out tonight, where your favourite stars shine bright,
Around the corner at the O-DE-ON, around the corner at the O-DE-ON.*

Details of concerts at the Odeon can be found at www.theduchess.org.uk and Donald's concerts and silent film accompaniments are listed on his web site www.donaldmackenzie.org.uk