

DETROIT THEATER ORGAN SOCIETY

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Lance Luce Returns

March 16, 2014 3:00 p.m.

The Detroit Theater Organ Society's 2014 concert season starts off with a very familiar face at the Senate Wurlitzer. Our own Lance Luce returns on March 16 to perform once again. Lance is well-acquainted with the Wurlitzer organ at the Senate, having played the organ there for several years. He is currently the President of the Detroit Theater Organ Society.

Lance is not just known here in Detroit. He has performed hundreds of concerts all over the United States, Canada, England and Australia.

His concerts are praised for appealing to audiences of all ages, containing a wide variety of music styles.

At age 18, Lance won first place honors in the Yamaha

National Electone organ competition in California. The next year he was appointed the Head Staff Organist at the famed Radio City Music Hall in New York, on the largest Wurlitzer ever built.

Lance has made many recordings, including being a part of the famous "Theatre Organ Greats—A Salute to Radio City Music Hall" double LP.

For many years, Lance was the "Featured Entertainment" at the console of a theatre organ at several "pizza parlour" style restaurants. Two in Michigan, and the highly successful "Organ Grinder Restaurant" in Toronto Canada, where he played for eight years.

Lance began playing the theatre pipe organ at age ten

at the Royal Oak Music Theatre near his Michigan home. By age thirteen he was playing at the same theatre for intermissions. During his teenage years he began playing the organ at a local church on Sundays, and performed countless times for area organ clubs and societies.

Lance is currently on the staff at the Fox Theatre in Detroit and Michigan Theatre in Ann Arbor, and is one of the organists at the Redford Theatre in Detroit. He continues to be a church organist, recording artists, and maintains a busy concert schedule.

Doors to the Senate Theater will open at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, March 16. Concert starts at 3:00 p.m. Come and enjoy our first concert of the season at the Senate Theater!



I t's Not the Organ, It's The Humidity!

From The Bench
Scott Smith

It happens every Winter at my house. As the temperature drops, the number of phone calls and emails begin to rise. Everyone is on the same wavelength, and everyone poses the same question: why does the organ sound so bad? The complaints range from concerned to annoyed to just plain baffled. Tremulants don't want to run. Stops fall out of tune. Some bass stops won't even work at all. The console combination action just wheezes. The simple answer is: it's the humidity, aggravated by the cold temperatures. There's even an unofficial name for this condition: The Winter Blues.

The chief component that operates any pipe organ is air; the same air that you and I breathe, and the same air that you and I curse when it gets cold and dry and rushes callously past our skin. Have you ever given any thought how many times during the average concert the air must cycle through the organ, out into the auditorium, down the cold air vents and back through the blower again? I'm not sure we could put a number on it. Every time the organ emits a sound, it is the end result of air causing something to make that sound.

Even when it's warm, if the air isn't kept humidified in some way, the organ begins to dry out. It's easy to think of wood as a solid material, like rock or metal, but the truth is that wood is like a bunch of soda straws clumped together. The fibers are porous in the center, and shrink and expand with the available surrounding humidity. Several years ago, I

attended a lecture about wood finishes, and the subject of the varying porosity of different types of wood came up. To prove his point, the presenter pulled out a fat cigar, lit it and inhaled a lungful of smoke. He then stunned us all by placing the end grain of a foot-long piece of red oak against his lips and easily blew the entire contents of his lungs through the wood and out the other end! But that's oak. It's a strong wood, but not appropriate for use in a pipe organ in anything but the case of a church organ because of its open porosity.

Like all pipe organs, the Fisher Wurlitzer is aging. The wood from which it is constructed is drying out, although not nearly as fast as it once did. Still, with all of that compressed air rushing through its innards, the organ would appreciate some humidified air now and then.

Evaporative humidifiers within the chambers can help keep the wood stops stable and reasonably in tune, plus help to hold the reit speeds at a more-or-less constant rate. Stoppers, even when packed tightly and greased with hard beeswax can fall when the humidity is low. Stability is key here, plus old wood will only take just so much flexing before cracks begin to appear in the weakest areas.

The major issue regarding the loss of humidity concerns the interior of the organ and cannot be overstated. This is the source of the problem with fluctuating wind pressures, galloping and shallow tremolos, a slow and/or weak combination action and the source for virtually every other weird

problem that happens at no other time of the year. Somehow, humidified air needs to be introduced at the blower intake starting around Halloween, and remain on until at least Memorial Day. Assuming that the instrument is played regularly, a system that runs in parallel with the blower on/off cycle (like the one the organ crew put together a year ago) will probably suffice, but the perfect situation is one where the wood remains dimensionally stable despite the outdoor weather. Obviously, a sophisticated system like that in use at Macy's (Wanamaker) Department Store in Philadelphia is ideal, but that would require the installation a variable frequency drive on the blower, which may be a bit overblown (pun intended) for most situations. The Wanamaker instrument makes use of relief valves throughout the organ in order to allow humidified air to escape when the organ is not in use, but it is generally accepted that these are not necessary in theatre instruments, as the prevalent use of tremolos allows for the free flow of air when the organ is turned off. In that case, the idea is to maintain a constant level of humidity throughout the interior of the organ without allowing moisture to build up to the point of condensation, or in a worse-case scenario, mold. These types of systems

are not uncommon these days, but they do come at a cost.

The passive humidification system at the Senate works well, as long as the organ is played regularly. When that happens, the organ is receiving humidified air right at the intake via the use of a system of misters, but they only operate when the organ is in operation and being played so that the humidified air can be drawn through the organ as the air is demanded. The more it's played, the better it is humidified. The more humidified the organ is, the more stable the wood, and the better the organ sounds. Simple as that. Unfortunately, with the extended period of cold and snowy weather we've had to deal with this year, relatively few brave souls have ventured out long enough to make the trek to the Senate, or anywhere else, for that matter. When Spring breaks, let's all make a point to reserve some time and play the fabulous Fisher Wurlitzer for an hour or two. Trust me, it will help tremendously.

Let's just hope this Winter ends before the next one gets here!

Scott Smith



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otes From the Editor

Dave Calendine, DTOS Board of Directors

It has been some time since I have had room to do any ramblings on here in the Newsletter, but I have some space here for a few items that I want to mention to our membership.

First, the Board of Directors received, with regrets, the resignation of Glenn Rank from the Board of Directors in January. Glenn has been a huge asset to our organization, holding several key positions in our organization over the past several years. His presence will be missed, but he will

still remain active with the organization and help whenever possible.

Our pesky roof leak above the men's restroom has returned with a vengeance. It has not only dripped down into the men's restroom bringing down more ceiling tiles, but now it is also dripping down onto the back corner of the main floor. With this winter never seeming to end, it will be some time before we can get the roofing company to come out and find the problem.

I am always looking for more ideas of items to put in the Newsletter. Do you have any ideas or suggestions? Let me know! I'm sure that after a while my ramblings get a little old!

Our last movie was our most successful one yet. E.T. brought in an enthusiastic crowd of mostly-new patrons into the Senate. Many commented on how they never knew that the theatre was open, and that they looked forward to returning in the future for another show. Most

of the patrons stayed after the movie to walk through the organ chambers. Many were surprised at just how much "stuff" was behind the screen! We hope to keep building on the success of E.T. and keep the crowds coming in. Our next movie will be Saturday, March 8 with an 8:00 p.m. showing of the 2002 movie musical, "Chicago."

I look forward to seeing you at the Senate Theatre for a concert and/or a movie!

Dave Calendine

UPCOMING MOVIE SCHEDULE FOR THE SENATE THEATER

Saturday, March 8—Chicago—8pm
Saturday, April 5—Easter Parade—8pm

Full schedule of events, including times and prices, can be found on the web site
WWW.DTOS.ORG

Are there movies you would like to see on the Senate Theater's new large screen? Let us know! The movie selection committee will be meeting soon to pick the next movies to be shown. E-mail Michael Fisher with your movie selections!

Visit our friends at the Redford Theatre for their classic film series.

March 14 & 15—The Lady Eve
March 28 & 29—Singin' In the Rain
April 11 & 12—Ben-Hur

Full schedule of events, including times and prices, can be found on the web site
WWW.REDFORDTHEATRE.COM

DETROIT THEATER
ORGAN SOCIETY

Over 50 Years of Entertainment!

Detroit Theater Organ Society

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WE'RE ON THE WEB!

WWW.DTOS.ORG

2014 Concert Series

March 16—Lance Luce

April 27—David Wickerham

May 18—Justin Lavoie

June 22—Tom Hoehn

September 21—Nathan Avakian

October 19—Tom Fortier

November 16—Melissa

Ambrose-Eidson

December 7—Donnie Rankin

All concerts are held at the Senate Theater.

Doors open at 2:00 p.m., concerts start at 3:00 p.m.



photo: Lance Luce