

# DETROIT THEATER ORGAN SOCIETY

A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

SENATE THEATER  
6424 MICHIGAN AVENUE  
DETROIT, MICHIGAN 48210

(313) 894-0850



## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

## HISTORY OF THE ORGAN

In the early 1900's, the seven Fisher brothers of Detroit had built a thriving business manufacturing horse-drawn carriages. Their craftsmanship with the wood and metal parts attracted the attention of the founders of General Motors who needed bodies for their horseless carriages. The Fisher brothers finally sold their carriage business to General Motors and became wealthy.

They decided to build a complex in what was called the New Center area of Detroit at Second Avenue and West Grand Boulevard. Their grandiose plans for the Fisher Building called for a 60 story central tower flanked by two 28 story towers. The building was designed by Albert Kahn and incorporated marble from all over the world. Included in the building was a state-of-the-art theater. Unfortunately, due to the onset of the great depression, only a 28 story tower was ever built. That tower contained the theater. The building remains, to this day, unfinished from the original Albert Kahn Design.

Mayer & Graven, well-known theater architects, were engaged to design the theater. They produced a wonder of Mayan/Byzantine design that included a fountain in the lobby with live fish. The pipe organ was commissioned to Wurlitzer and installed in 1928. The organ console was to match the Mayan Indian design of the 3,500 seat theater.

The organ, a unique 4 manual, 34 rank Wurlitzer with its ornamental Mayan decoration on the console, was installed in the theater in four chambers. It was a memorial to the parents of the seven Fisher Brothers. Their parents enjoyed classical organ and also enjoyed singing gospel hymns. Therefore, this organ was to be capable of performing various kinds of music. The specifications contain several stops not usually found on theater organs. The reeds are filled with fire, the strings are lush and the flutes and tibias mellow and sweet. This allows the music of Bach and Widor to be performed with magnificent glory as well as the music of Gershwin, Rogers and Porter.

In its original home in the Fisher Theater, the organ was installed in four chambers with the grand piano on a small balcony on the left side of the theater. The console was on a lift in the orchestra pit, which rose from the basement to above the stage level. The organ was originally intended to accompany silent movies when the orchestra was not available. However, sound films came in soon after the dedication on November 11, 1928. The organ was only used for intermissions on Friday night played by the great Don Miller, as well as an occasional radio broadcast from radio station WJR located in the tower of the Fisher Building. The organ was removed from the Fisher Theater early in 1961 when the movie palace was converted to a legitimate playhouse.

**PLAYING MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM**

Mr. / Mrs. / Miss \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse Name \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address \_\_\_\_\_ Home Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_ Business Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby apply for Playing Membership in the Detroit Theater Organ Society. I understand that the annual membership fee is \$160.00 and that it is due no later than January 1<sup>st</sup> of every year.

I agree to abide by and comply with the Society's Constitution, By-Laws and Operating Policies. I certify this with my signature on this application.

I understand that as a Playing Member in good standing that I shall have voting rights at all Society Business meetings and that I shall have the following privileges:

- A) Playing the DTOS Wurlitzer (after scheduling a orientation)
- B) Recording concerts held at the Senate Theater
- C) Bringing a limited number of Guests to concerts as described in applicable rules, Regulations and operating procedures.

I understand and agree that this application is submitted for consideration and acceptance by the Board of Directors of this Society. If it is accepted, I agree to pay the annual dues as required to maintain my membership in good standing for at least one year from the acceptance date.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature / Date

Please mail this application in the enclosed self addressed stamped envelope. The application will be reviewed at the regularly scheduled Board of Directors meeting following receipt of the application.

**FOR OFFICE USE ONLY**

Signature of Sponsoring DTOS Member \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Officer / Director \_\_\_\_\_

Date Acceptance was received by the Executive Board \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Acceptance as a Playing Member \_\_\_\_\_

Member Number \_\_\_\_\_

**ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

Mr. / Mrs. / Miss \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse Name \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address \_\_\_\_\_ Home Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_ Business Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby apply for Associate Membership in the Detroit Theater Organ Society. I understand that the annual membership fee is \$120.00 and that it is due no later than January 1<sup>st</sup> of every year.

I agree to abide by and comply with the Society's Constitution, By-Laws and Operating Policies. I certify this with my signature on this application.

I understand that as a Associate Member in good standing that I do not have voting rights at any Society Business meetings and that I shall have the following privileges:

- A) Bringing a limited number of Guests to concerts as described in applicable rules, Regulations and operating procedures.

I understand and agree that this application is submitted for consideration and acceptance by the Board of Directors of this Society. If it is accepted, I agree to pay the annual dues as required to maintain my membership in good standing for at least one year from the acceptance date.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature / Date

Please mail this application in the enclosed self addressed stamped envelope. The application will be reviewed at the regularly scheduled Board of Directors meeting following receipt of the application.

**FOR OFFICE USE ONLY**

Signature of Sponsoring DTOS Member \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Officer / Director \_\_\_\_\_

Date Acceptance was received by the Executive Board \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Acceptance as a Associate Member \_\_\_\_\_

Member Number \_\_\_\_\_

## THE DETROIT THEATER ORGAN SOCIETY

By the end of 1960, the end of the Fisher Theater as a movie house was at hand. The organ was put up for sale and the theater was gutted and converted to a legitimate playhouse. George Orbits, a local organ enthusiast, purchased the instrument and removed it with plans to install it in his new home. The Fisher brothers chose Mr. Orbits' bid, preferring that the organ remain intact and in the Detroit area. George and a few other organ enthusiasts removed the instrument and stored it safely in a warehouse until George's new home was built to accommodate it.

After the Wurlitzer pipe organ had been safely removed from the Fisher Theater and placed in storage, someone suggested that they form a theater organ club and use the organ until George was ready for his home installation. George agreed to this provided there would be at least 60 people in the area who were willing to pay \$5.00 per month to support such a club. In a short time, a group of 60 people, interested in preserving and enjoying theater pipe organ, were assembled and formed The Detroit Theater Organ Club.

The members located and rented an abandoned theater, the Iris, on Detroit's East Side. This theater was a 900-seat vaudeville house with about 300 seats on the main floor and the remainder in a "stadium" style balcony. In mid-1961, the organ installation had begun in the tiny theater and club flourished. Artists from all over the country came to this little theater to see and play this wonder of musical history. It soon became apparent that, with an increasing membership, a larger more permanent building must be found.

Late in 1962, after a citywide search, the Senate Theater was discovered on Detroit's West Side. The theater had closed some years earlier and the property had reverted to the Michigan DNR for nonpayment of property taxes. The building was a derelict by that time. An offer of \$1,000 was submitted to purchase the land and building and the offer was accepted.

Early in 1963, the membership began the restoration of the theater and construction of the new chambers, doing most of the work themselves. The members disassembled and moved the giant Wurlitzer from the Iris Theater and began the new installation. The first concert in the new building was held in October 1964 with Ashley Miller at the console. With the great success of the new club, the IRS was petitioned for a tax exemption.

The club grew through the 1970's and there were often waiting lists for membership. But, as with so many organizations, the 1980's brought a declining membership. There was now a generation of young people who knew little of these instruments and who did not care to become a member of anything. They would rather pay their money for a performance and then walk away with no responsibilities.

In 1988, it was recognized that, if the Detroit Theater Organ Club was to survive, it must have a 501(c)(3) Educational and Charitable tax status. In addition, the name must be changed to remove the word "Club" since that word gave the negative feeling of "exclusivity" to the public. In June 1989, a change was made and the organization obtained a 501(c)(3) tax exemption along with the new name of The Detroit Theater Organ Society.

## THE SENATE THEATER

In the middle of the Roaring Twenties, the Martin Bros. Washing Machine factory was demolished and a brand new theater started to take shape at 6424 Michigan Avenue. The theater opened on October 7, 1926 with only one film, "The Volga Boatman." The theater was built with a full fly stage, but there is no record anywhere of any live performances on the stage. We know, however, from people who lived in the neighborhood, in that era, that vaudeville shows were regularly presented on the Senate stage. There was a small organ installed which, in later years, was moved to radio station WXYZ where it perished in a fire.

By 1958, the theater gave up the ghost, closed and became a cold, derelict hulk with a flooded basement. That is how the Detroit Theater Organ Club found it in 1962 when it was purchased and restored. Today, the theater is in excellent condition and has served well as a home for the giant Wurlitzer organ.

The four principal chambers of the organ are installed in new chambers on the theater stage and the traps and percussions are installed in the theater's two original chambers on either side of the auditorium. The console and piano are located on a new stage extension constructed by the members. The following is a listing of the pipe complement of this Wurlitzer organ, Opus #1953 as it was designed and as it is presently installed:

**FOUNDATION CHAMBER**

Tibia Clausa  
16' Diaphonic Diapason  
4' Harmonic Flute  
Gamba  
Gamba Celeste

**ORCHESTRAL CHAMBER**

Kinura  
French Horn  
16' String Solo  
String Celeste  
Brass Trumpet  
Orchestral Oboe  
Oboe Horn  
Cor Anglais  
16' Horn Diapason  
Quintadena  
Quint Celeste  
Brass Saxophone

**MAIN CHAMBER**

16' Concert Flute  
Viol D'Orchestra  
Viol Celeste  
Salicional  
Viox Celeste  
16' Tuba Horn  
Vox Humana  
Dulciana  
Unda Maris  
Clarinet  
Krumet

**LEFT PERCUSSION**

Cathedral Chimes  
Xylophone  
Wood Bar Harp  
Glockenspiel  
Tuned Sleigh Bells  
Bass Drum  
Snare Drum  
Dance Cymbal  
Crash Cymbal  
Castanets  
Tambourine  
Sand Block  
Wood Block

**SOLO CHAMBER**

Vox Humana  
16' Tibia  
Open Diapason  
English Post Horn  
16' Tuba Mirabilis

**RIGHT PERCUSSION**

16' Wood Open Diapason  
Chrysoglott-Vibraphone  
Chinese Gong  
Master Xylophone

**ON STAGE**

Wurlitzer Grand Piano which can be played from the organ console as follows: **Great Manual** – 16', 8'; **Solo Manual** – 8'; **Accompaniment Manual** – 8'; **Pedal** – 16', 8'.

The organ console has 10 pistons below each manual with the Great Manual pistons being double touch that become general pistons. Each of the six chambers is under individual expression with a single general expression pedal controlling all chambers. The 13 tremulants and the 25 hp Spencer Turbine Blower are located under the stage.