



Detroit Theater Organ Society

October 2011 Newsletter

Volume 50, Issue 9

DAVE WICKERHAM RETURNS

Sunday, October 9, 2011—3:00 P.M.
Senate Theater, Detroit MI

The Detroit Theater Organ Society is proud to welcome back to the Senate Theater Dave Wickerham.

Dave is no stranger to the Senate, and those that have heard him know that there is a great concert in store! The concert starts at 3:00 p.m. on Sunday, October 9. The doors to the Senate Theater will open at 2:00 p.m. for those wishing to arrive early.

Dave Wickerham was born in Encino, California in 1962. He began playing the electronic organ at the age of four and had his first pipe organ experience at age 10. His musical education started at age 7.

When he moved to Arizona in 1976, he became Associate Organist at the famous Organ Stop Pizza Restaurants in Phoenix, Mesa and Tucson. While in Arizona, he continued his musical studies with Rosemond Crowley, one of the few remaining descendants of the



DAVE WICKERHAM ... (continued from first page)

Louis Vierne line of organists. He attended the University of Arizona in Tucson on a full scholarship, pursuing classical organ studies for six years with Dr. Roy Johnson.

In 1984, Dave moved to the Chicago area to become Staff Organist at Pipes and Pizza in Lansing, Illinois. In addition to his performance there, he concertized frequently, as well as ministering musically and serving at various churches.

August of 1990 found the Wickerham family – Dave, his wife and two young children - moving to Wisconsin, where he was one of the featured Staff Organists at the Piper Music Palace in Greenfield, a position he held for 10 years.

In the spring of 2000, Dave ushered in the new millennium with a limited special engagement, as a featured organist at "Roxy's Pipe Organ Pizzeria", part

(continued on next page)
of a \$26,000,000 expansion phase at the FIESTA Casino and Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. The Wickerham's, Dave, Rhonda, and now three great kids, spent a year and a half there before returning back home to Wisconsin in August of 2001... For the next three years, Dave resumed his position at the Piper Music Palace and was also the Principal Organist at Williams Bay Lutheran Church in Lake Geneva, WI.

He enjoys concertizing frequently to many audiences including various chapters of the American Theatre Organ Society. In April of 1999, he took great

pleasure being a feature artist in Melbourne, Australia for the convention of the Theatre Organ Society of Australia for which he received rave reviews. He returned "Down Under" for a five-week concert tour in New Zealand and Australia during the summer of 2003 and has been asked to come back to repeat the same complete tour in a near future season.

Dave also enjoys recording and has recently "sold out" his fourth CD "Sounds of Music" recorded on the famous 5 Manual, 80 Rank Theatre Organ at the Sanfilippo Residence in Barrington, IL. There are two NEW recording projects that are soon to be completed and released.

Currently, Dave and his family enjoy living in South Florida where he has accepted the position of Organist in Residence - Curator at the Milhous Museum in Boca Raton. The museum houses three pipe organs and a vast amassment of beautifully restored automatic antique musical instruments and classic cars from the turn of last century.

Come out for a great afternoon of music at the Senate!



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dick Leichtamer
President, DTOS Board of Directors

Hi everyone! I wanted to take this opportunity to welcome everyone to come to the Dave Wickerham Concert. I have heard him several times at past concerts and his playing and selections just seem to get better and better. He almost seems to become one with the organ.

Please make it a point to get down here to the Senate Theater and hear this excellent artist. Bring your friends with you. What better way to spend a Sunday afternoon than listening to the fine artistry of Dave Wickerham. See you at the concert!

R ENOVATION UPDATE

Connie Masserant
DTOS Board of Directors

This month has been spent on tying up several loose ends along with planning the workers' "Thank You" party.

The eight chandeliers have all been installed with only a few missing crystals that have been ordered.

There is still much to do to complete the stage area. While it is now functional and safe, there are still several items that need to be completed. This will probably be an ongoing project throughout the winter.

The Directors wanted to show their appreciation to the volunteers who have brought us this far so a party was given in their honor at the club.

The evening began with hors d'oeuvres and beverages followed by a catered dinner from Pasquales. Volunteers along with their guests sat at linen covered



tables with a single red rose as a centerpiece. Entertainment was provided by the Mighty Wurlitzer. A fun time was had by all.

In the future it is hoped that we can have more get togethers with potlucks at our club. Those of you who can't participate in the physical labor may find it rewarding in helping with any part of the planning stages. If you are interested, please contact me. My info is at the bottom of the article.

Connie Masserant
Cmasserant13@gmail.com
734-652-6004 cell
734-379-6645 home

UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE REDFORD THEATRE

October 7 & 8—Three Stooges Festival

October 21 & 22—Munster, Go Home

October 29 8:00 p.m. ONLY —The Hunchback of Notre Dame (silent film with live accompaniment by Dave Calendine on the Barton Theatre Pipe Organ)

November 4 & 5—From Here to Eternity

November 18 & 19—Fiddler on the Roof

December 2 & 3—The Miracle on 34th Street

December 10 8:00 p.m. ONLY —Walt Strony in concert on the Barton Theatre Pipe Organ, also featuring the Laurel & Hardy silent film, "Big Business"

December 16 & 17—It's a Wonderful Life

All of these great films are shown Friday and Saturday evenings at 8:00 p.m. as well as Saturday afternoon at 2:00 p.m. (unless otherwise noted)

Organ overtures start thirty minutes prior to each show time.

Sit back and enjoy the movies under the Redford's star-lit sky!

Visit the Redford Theatre on the web at www.redfordtheatre.com

Please consider helping the society save money each month by electing to receive this Newsletter electronically. The savings on paper, printing, and mailing are quite significant. It is quick and simple to sign up. Just send an e-mail to:

Dave@Calendine.net

and ask for your Newsletter to be sent to you each month in your e-mail.

FROM THE BENCH

Scott Smith
The Modern Organ

What would the Fisher Wurlitzer be like if it were built today? How would it be different, and what would remain the same? It takes some imagination along with some application of other designs created over the past eighty-plus years. While we're at it, how does the traditional organ compare with new designs? Should there even be new designs? Who dreamed up these new designs and why do we think we need them?

There's no doubt that legendary organist Jesse Crawford had a tremendous influence on the expansion of the specifications of Wurlitzer organs even as far back as the early 1920s. It didn't take long at all for those expansions to be seen on the consoles of other builders once they were spotted on a Wurlitzer. The notion of a pipe organ that could emulate the theatre orchestra was very quickly coming to realization while Crawford was beginning to enjoy major star status. Theatre instruments evolved rather quickly at that time, and then, just as things were coming to full fruition, the end came haltingly. Enter George Wright, who from the get-go was not only a phenomenal talent, but also a constant experimenter with tonal colors, pitches and controls right up to the time of his passing in the late 1990s. During his high school days in the mid-to-late 30s, Wright was allowed to build and refine a composite theatre instrument in the school's auditorium from discarded organs and parts that still exists and plays today. Later, Wright would build two noteworthy instruments of his own in the Los Angeles suburbs of Pasadena and Hollywood, both of which were used for recording. Wright managed to successfully combine the traditional theatre organ with notions that reflected his own tastes and influences, including Hammond and other electronic organs, bands, orchestras and piano. Tibia pitches were greatly expanded (probably the Hammond influence), trap actions modified to play drums, cymbals and effects not found in the original organs, and there was obviously a great emphasis on pipe-to-pipe regulation and tuning, all of which could be heard on his many recordings. Wright also had several duplicate sets in storage so that those which he felt

suited a certain piece of music better could be pulled out and temporarily installed for his various recordings. During the early 1960s, Chicago organist John Seng took the traditional theatre organ, combined it with Wright's notions and added many more of his own. His theatre organ creation in the Auditorium Building of St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, Illinois is now seen as the first truly "modern" theatre organ. By the time the organ-equipped pizza parlors came around in the 1970s, modern designs were becoming the norm, and those two groundbreaking studio organs by Wright and Seng paved the way. In the early 80s, electronic relays began to find their way into church and theatre organs and became commonplace. Software-based relays allowed for customization by the customer or trained users in the 90s. Some of the more outspoken traditionalists cried "foul" when they realized the possibilities for changing ranks and pitches were easy and almost limitless.

One of the most unfortunate battles regarding the preservation and strict use of old technology versus completely modernized instruments began in an overheard conversation just a few years ago. A well-known organist was asked how he changed the manner in which he performed a concert when faced with an instrument that was all original. I'm paraphrasing here, but he quipped something like, "I just dumb it down a little." An equally well-known organ technician and builder took major exception to the overheard comment, complained bitterly to anyone who would listen, and the whole thing turned into a urinary flow competition on the pages of a well-known theatre organ publication for several months between the two. Thankfully, it's over, but not without casualties. In the end, nothing was accomplished for either party.

Back in the day, organ designers were rather idealistic, and understandably so. The plates on most Wurlitzer consoles clearly stated "Unit Orchestra," and they tried to live up to that ideal. Nearly every stop on a unit orchestra (or theatre organ, as it has come to be known) represents something of a compromise when

FROM THE BENCH ... *continued from previous page*

translating the instruments of the orchestra to orchestral-sounding stops, but despite being in its infancy, the best organ manufacturers managed to do it successfully with skill and confidence. For example, the Tuba Horn, one of Wurlitzer's finest achievements pretends to be a real Tuba down in the basses and up into the midrange, where it begins to emulate something that appears to be a cross between a Trombone, a Flugel Horn and a French Horn. When that ends, it simply carries the idea of the stop up to the top of the keyboard. There was at least one (British?) manufacturer who took the range of imitating orchestral instruments quite literally and the pipes simply ran out at the same point. In theory, that's really nice, but it doesn't help the organist who is wondering where all of the rest of the pipes went. I can only imagine how many conversations that took place between the organist and the organ technician, who patiently tried to explain what was going on. "They did WHAT?" undoubtedly came out of the mouth of more than one organist.

Strings were obviously rather important to the original designers, and they took their range seriously. The Viol d'Orchestre and its matching celeste appear to represent actual violins, which is evidenced by the fact that the pipes extend up to the top of the 2' range. It's also a matter of clarity, but we'll get to that later. The Gambas appear to represent the softer and darker violas, and it's interesting to note how they are big and powerful on some Wurlitzers, and soft and demure on others. The Fisher organ is an example of the latter.

The Salicionals, which were Wurlitzer's one-size-fits-all string were essentially a cross between the viols and the violas, and except in the smaller organs, their compass is often somewhat less and even lower in pitch than other strings. In general, Salicionals are remarkably adaptable to different situations, everything from soft Aeolines (with a lower cutup and a small Dulciana roller) to rather assertive solo stops when opened up. The range of the Solo Strings appears to represent the lower violins, the louder violas, and the double basses. Their job is to cut through and lead a big ensemble with speed and clarity, and they do it well.

While the overall sound of today's theatre organs seem to differ little from those of the past, their

playability has increased dramatically. Aside from increased Tibia pitches, if there's any group of tonal color that has increased in its scope since the Golden Era, it would be the strings. As organists, we like having more and better dynamic control as well as that of tonal color, particularly in the upper ranges. Even the largest of the older organs generally didn't have much in the way of strings at the 4' pitch. The Fisher organ has only the Vd'O and celeste plus the pair of Gambas, the latter of which doesn't offer much of anything in the way of clarity or color up there. Today, we like to think that all strings should go to the top of the 4' range, so that we may have more options and better clarity.

Let us remember that in the Golden Era of the theatre organ, the instruments were undergoing a slow, steady metamorphosis. Smart and savvy organbuilders were hearing back from the top organists as to what they liked, what they didn't like and what they'd like to see happen. Wurlitzer was interested in product development even as far back as the early Teens, as evidenced by letters to Robert Hope-Jones, who grudgingly followed through with their requests. The Wurlitzer Company had bailed out Hope-Jones when his firm began to tank financially (having been fired by Skinner), recognizing the inventive genius in the man behind all of the bravura. Part of the deal, however, was in keeping him completely away from the manufacturing end of things. In exchange, he got a steady paycheck and a list of projects to keep him busy and out of their hair. Tragically, Hope-Jones felt impotent to direct his brainchild, the unit orchestra and fell into a deep depression. Coupled with personal conflicts and frustrations, he chose to end life by his own hand in 1914. How sad it is that he never got to see the development of his beloved creation through that Golden Era. Would he have been proud? Or annoyed? We can only speculate, but surely he would have been pleased to see his name on every brass nameplate that appeared on so many Wurlitzer organs around the world. On the other hand, he may have been equally displeased, being unable to tonally direct those same instruments.

NEXT MONTH: PART II OF THE MODERN ORGAN

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

Dave Calendine
DTOS Board of Directors

When I took over the position of editor for the Newsletter, one of the ideas I had with the Newsletter was to describe some of the details of various things that often get over-looked in the whole “scheme of things” when it comes to operating our organization. One of the details with our organization comes with the “day of concert” operations. Many jobs need to be done in a short amount of time, and unfortunately, there are not enough people volunteering to do many of the tasks that need to be done.

On the day of a concert, while many of us are attending church, there are usually a handful of people taking care of last-minute organ issues such as tuning, chasing a dead note, cleaning any notes stuck on (cyphers) and any other little thing that might need fixed.

Around 11:30 a.m., the first workers start to arrive to open the theatre, turn on the lights, and get set up for people to arrive. If only it was that easy!

Opening the theatre requires keys, and lots of them. The side gate has to be open. The side door has to be magnetically unlocked. The emergency exits on the side have to be checked. The front doors have to be unlocked. This can take about fifteen to twenty minutes just doing that.

The normal “every-day” lights that are used in the theatre are just a small amount of what gets turned on before the first patron comes through the doors. Many more lights in the lobbies and over the theater seats are turned on.

The concession stand gang arrives and gets to work warming up the popcorn, making sure that the coffee is made (and lots of it!) as well as stocking up the refrigerators for those that like a cold pop or water. And don’t forget the candy! We have lots of it available for purchase!

As many of you may know, we record each performance on our Mighty Wurlitzer. In order for this to happen, our recording engineer is busy making sure the microphones are in place and working properly.

Blank CDs are in the burner ready to go, as well as a digital tape back-up. Elsewhere upstairs, the light board is tested to make sure that the spotlight works, as well as checking that the other stage lights are ready.

Once our artists arrives back in the theater, our hosts make sure that they are set with any last-minute tests of the organ, as well as making sure that their dressing room is stocked with ice and beverages, as well as anything else that the artists may need.

At the back row of the theater is our sound board with many knobs, levers and switches. The microphones are placed on stage as well as at the console so we can hear any talking that happens from the stage.

The tickets are placed at the two selling stations ready for eager patrons. Money is delivered to the ticket stations, the 50/50 counter, the record counter and the concession stand. All is about ready to go.

With one hour left before the start of the concert, all work is done. The artist is relaxing in the dressing room (or out for a quick meal before the show). Our Wurlitzer organ is shut off to let it “relax” before the show. Doors are unlocked, and we let everyone in.

During the concert, lights are run. Microphones are turned on and off. Ticket counters are put away to make room for conversations during intermission and after the show. 50/50 tickets are sold. Recordings are sold. Candy, pop and popcorn are sold.

The second half of the concert is done, and now it is time to close up. Coffee pots are cleaned up, lights are shut off. Doors are locked up. The artists is taken back to the hotel (or airport), the alarm is set, and everyone goes home. Another great day at the Senate.

Lots to do, but right now we have very few people to do all of these tasks. Won’t you consider becoming a part of the concert production staff? Please see either myself, Connie Masserant, or Dick Leichtamer if you would be interested in helping out. Many hands make light work! See you at the Senate!



Photo: Lance Luce

The Detroit Theater Organ Society

Senate Theater

6424 Michigan Avenue

Detroit, MI 48210-2957

Telephone: (313) 894-0850

Concert Hotline: (313) 894-4100

Website: www.dtos.org

Look for us on Facebook!

2011 Concert Series

SENATE THEATER

October 9—David Wickerham

November 20—Tony O’Brien

December 11—Dave Calendine