

# DETROIT THEATER ORGAN SOCIETY

Volume 54, Issue 6

June 2015



DTOS  
Executive Board  
& Directors

- **President**  
Lance Luce  
lanceluce@wowway.com
- **Vice President**  
Michael Fisher  
fisher.michael65@yahoo.com
- **Treasurer**  
Dave Calendine  
dave@calendine.net
- **Corporate Secretary**  
Kevin Werner  
kevwer@comcast.net
- Joan Brown  
jbeethoven@netzero.com
- Gil Francis  
ggf@juno.com
- Paul Jacyk  
paul5jacyk@aol.com
- Dick Leichtamer  
tibiaplenu434@buckeye-express.com
- Bob Weil  
robertjweil@yahoo.com
- Chris Werner  
rolandefleur@gmail.com

## R on Rhode

The Detroit Theater Organ Society is pleased to present our next concert at the Senate Theater. Ron Rhode has entertained audiences all over the world, and this month he brings his talents to the Mighty Wurlitzer for us to enjoy.

Ron Rhode is in his 41st year as one of the most popular theatre organists. His recordings have received "Top Rating 10/10" from *CD Review Magazine*, and he was awarded "Theatre Organist Of The Year - 1989" by the American Theatre Organ Society. He has played virtually every major theatre organ installation in the world.

Ron is a native of Illinois, where he began his musical career on the piano. He quickly advanced to classical pipe organ, and in 1968 held his first theatre organ job playing for roller skating. In 1973 Ron moved to Phoenix, Arizona, to start a long association with the Organ Stop Pizza restaurants. In 1975 Ron moved to Mesa, Arizona, where he held the Featured Organist post and played for

pizza patrons until November, 1986. In July, 1988, Ron again joined the staff as Associate Organist until his retirement in 2000. In Phoenix, he has been the Featured Organist for the Orpheum Theatre Silent Sunday Series, a silent movie series, since its inception in May, 1999.

Since leaving the pizza parlor on a regular basis, Ron has completed a Bachelor of Education degree in Early Childhood Education at Arizona State University, and in 1995 he earned a Master of Elementary Education degree from Northern Arizona State University. He is currently a Media Specialist at Roosevelt Elementary in Mesa, Arizona. In addition to teaching, recording, and concertizing, Ron is the organist for the

Sunday, June 28, 2015  
3:00 p.m.

Church of the Beatitudes, U.C.C., in Phoenix, Arizona.

Although Ron is held to the classroom through the week, he still finds time to maintain an active concert and recording career. He continues to perform professionally across the United States, Canada, England, and Australia. He is a favorite at American Theatre Organ Society national and regional conventions. He has more than twenty recordings to his credit.

Come to the Senate on Sunday, June 28 and you will hear why Ron Rhode is in high demand for concerts. The doors open at 2:00 p.m., with the concert starting at 3:00 p.m. This is our last concert before the summer break, so come and enjoy one last concert before fall!



# M arvin Spear

December 11, 1928 – May 21, 2015

*The following was written by Glenn Rank*

Over the years our Society (Club) has occasionally benefited financially and physically from substantial contributions from its Members. Over two years ago Marvin Spear stepped up to provide the necessary funding for a new large movie screen. The one half ton screen was manufactured in Germany and shipped to the US via freighter increased our appeal to potential renters of our theater and allowed us to professionally offer classic films to the general public.

Marvin had been around the Senate for many years, pitching in wherever help was needed. For many years Marvin along with Bill Hart, Jim Casterson, Bob Weil, Carol and Jack Uelsmann, John Elliot, Lou Sabella, Jim & Edie Teevin and others did ALL the cleaning of the theater, maintained the lobby shadow boxes and updated the marquee prior to concerts. Another project Marvin and his team accomplished was the sew-

ing of new draperies for all the doorways, in the auditorium using auto upholstery fabric donated by Ford Motor Car through Marvin's niece Bonnie, who sewed auto seat covers at Ford's.

For many years Marvin also ran a small General Store in the area across from the current record counter, where 100% of the profits from the sales provided the funds to purchase many of the abandoned derelict homes as they became available for our parking lot on the east side of the Senate. Merchandise for this venue was all hand crafted items that he along with Carol Uelsmann, Sherry Leichtamer and Glenn Rank to name a few made and donated to the cause. From Kleenex box covers to Totti tunes (small battery operated musical devices that were placed in the toilet paper spools that played music when you unrolled the paper) to kitchen towels with crocheted tops to ceramic mugs, Marvin's Craft Corner had it all.

Marvin not being a very shy man, would on a concert night

when sales were slow, go out and work the audience to drum up sales.

Marvin lost his battle suffering from several health issues on May 21, 2015. He is survived by many nieces and nephews. Our

condolences go out to his family and many friends and caregivers.

Rest in peace our friend, we look forward to seeing you the next time around.



Visit our friends at the Redford Theatre for their classic film series and organ concerts

June 26 & 27—The Goonies

July 10 & 11—Jurassic Park

July 17, 18 & 19—Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory

July 24 & 25—The Shawshank Redemption

July 26—Justin LaVoie in Concert on the Barton Theatre Organ

August 7 & 8—Mildred Pierce

August 15—Pulp Fiction

August 21 & 22—Forrest Gump

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

[WWW.REDFORDTHEATRE.COM](http://WWW.REDFORDTHEATRE.COM)

# A natomy Of A Restoration

To someone who's never done it before, the notion of restoring a regulator is mind-boggling. Even if you only do it once in your life, you'll never forget it. Yours truly will readily admit that when faced with doing it for the first time many years ago, the challenge seemed daunting. With help over the phone from sympathetic friends and colleagues, I was able to get through it, but when I was done, I swore I'd never do another one. Just for the record, by my count, I've now recovered about fifty of the things over time, so it appears I got over my phobia. Still, it requires a certain mindset of grit and absolute determination, and even those who do this sort of thing all the time will confess that they would prefer not to do it all day, every day.

Patching regulators, usually in the corner gussets only kicks the can down the road. It may last for a while, but at some point, the rotting leather will tear again and again as patches are progressively applied to the surface. Sooner or later, one's hands are forced. While the process is time-consuming and therefore a bit expensive, it's always best to bite the bullet and take care of the problem before the leak becomes bigger, wind pressures reduce accordingly and tuning is disaffected. Whatever investment one makes in restoration

is paid back for many, many years to come.

The worst part of the whole process is the teardown. Every last scrap of the old leather on the surface of the regulator has to be removed, along with the glue. It's no secret that it's dirty, messy and time-consuming. If you're lucky enough to be restoring a regulator that's never been recovered before, you're in luck. Back when Wurlitzer and it's competitors were making up these things originally, hide glue was the standard of the land. Even modern tests will say that it has great shear strength, and rates right up there with the latest-and-greatest adhesives produced today. However, the best part about the hide glue is the fact that, after sticking stubbornly to both the leather and wood for most of last century, it will come off readily with heat and water. Heaven help us when someone has used Elmer's or some sort of white or carpenter's glue (known in the trade as "EWG" or Evil White Glue). It's an extra day for the removal process, and requires the introduction of some stinky chemistry to do so. The best craftsmen restore regulators using fresh hot hide glue, and while it's no longer available in most hardware stores today, it is still readily available in dry flake form from various resources, including pipe organ supply houses,

leather suppliers and specialty wood craft outlets. Decades from now, when it comes time to recover the regulator again, the leather and glue will come off easily with heat and water.

While some restorers prefer the use of a belt sander to remove the old material, we tend to like an old clothes iron over a rag soaked in water, and just plain elbow grease to scrub it down to the surface. No wood material is ever lost, which is almost impossible to do with a belt sander. Once completely torn down, the regulator is allowed to dry overnight before proceeding.

At this point, the regulator is ready to begin the process of application of new leather, but this particular regulator is being re-engineered for a very special purpose, and that means the application of new material will have to wait for several more days. Let us digress for an explanation of the goals of this exercise, shall we?

Originally, the Fisher console was outfitted with a modest-sized regulator called an "equalizer" by Wurlitzer, also known as a "winker" in some camps. These are generally referred to as book regulators, as they are hinged at one end and appear to open and close much like a book. Inside is a single cone valve that allows gulps of static air into a cavity when the console or affected

## Part 2: The Teardown Scott Smith

part requires more air. Equalizers have their good and bad points, but the worst one in this case is their inability to keep up with the demands of a large four-manual console, at least the way we expect them to snap to attention today. In other words, much of the time, the 10" X 24" equalizer simply could not deliver enough volume of air quickly enough to supply the console with what it needed to move all 281 stop tabs in one direction or the other all at once. Our Michigan winters only exacerbate the problem, and therein lies the crux of the matter. Technicians tinkered with extra springs that went in and came back out seasonally for decades, but here's kicking that can down the road again. The console was simply starved for air. During the initial process of our comprehensive restoration, we procured, restored and installed a standard 20" X 30" regulator from a long-ago-dismantled Wurlitzer organ, and it worked just perfectly for a few years right up to the end of operations in 2009. The equalizer displaced by the standard regulator was later repurposed elsewhere in the organ, and the new/old regulator put in its place beneath the stage. Time moved on, and shortly after reopening in 2011, the decision was made to increase the size of the stage and put the console on a rolling plat-

### Senate Theater Quiet for the Summer

While there are no shows scheduled for the summer,  
there are still things to do at our theater.

Many small work projects await someone to do them. If you are interested in helping out, please contact anyone on the Board of Directors!



# A n a t o m y O f A R e s t o r a t i o n ... continued from previous page

form. For the sake of versatility of the stage, it was considered the right thing to do, but, aside from placing the old cable in a slightly perilous situation, the additional 25' of orange drain hose used as wind conductor did the combination action absolutely no good. Simply put, the closer a regulator of any sort is placed to the item in question, be it windchest or relay or console, the quicker it can respond to the demand of that item. The further away...well...just push a collective general piston on the Great manual in the Winter and see what you get...if anything. Even in the warmer weather months, tabs will move, but you'll wait...and wait...and wait. In the meantime, there is no "pause" button on the metronome, and it keeps going, no matter what the console is doing. The word "maddening" comes to mind. Clearly, given our circumstances, something had to be done.

As you can imagine, in our travels, we see all sorts of things when inspecting pipe organs and collections of associated parts. In this particular case, we were invited to inspect the remains of a 1919 vintage Moller organ, formerly installed in the First Presbyterian Church in Bay City until 1983, when the new Casavant organ went in. We are told that, somewhere between those two dates, the local church builder added a quasi-Echo division to the organ, mostly comprised of parts and pipes of a 2/7 Barton organ procured from nearby Saginaw's Mecca Theatre. For whatever reason, a 26" X 35" Wurlitzer regulator (source unknown) was introduced to provide the air to

the division, and reportedly lived in the attic. When one of the local pipe organ enthusiasts bought the remains of the organ in the 80s, the regulator came along with it, and everything was taken to a cold storage unit, where it laid in silent repose for the next thirty years. Not long ago, the rent was increased, and suddenly, the enthusiast lost his enthusiasm. When I first spied it, I knew exactly what purpose possibly lay in wait for it, and the enthusiast was only too happy to donate it to the club.

Upon disassembling the regulator, it became clear that most of the soot ejected by the church's coal chute went directly into the organ blower and deposited itself into this regulator in the attic of the church. It was undoubtedly the filthiest regulator I've ever encountered, and the cleanup was hampered by the addition of many, many chunks of felt apparently tacked on to silence air leaks all over the thing, which acted as little filters. If they'd only taken the time to apply new leather gaskets, none of the yards of felt would have been needed. Talk about kicking the can down the road!

So now back to where reality rears its ugly head. A regulator of some sort needs to ride on the console platform in order to be close enough to provide adequate air to the combination

action. No two ways about it. With only 16" between the back of the console and the edge of the platform, it became apparent that there were roughly five options available to realistically address the problem:

(1) Put the original 10" X 24" equalizer on the back of the platform. This would only satisfy those concerned with absolute originality, and not the needs of the console.

(2) Build up an all-new equalizer that would be simply a larger version of the original. Given the fact that the original equalizer's only air feed from the static supply is a slightly larger cone valve, this doesn't seem like much of an improvement. When air is demanded by the console, it doesn't want to wait. It wants it all and it wants it NOW!

(3) Move the 20" X 30" regulator up from the "Land Down Under". That would be fine, except it would hang over the end of the platform by several inches, especially after being

covered by a protective enclosure.

(4) Find some sort of regulator built by a company other than Wurlitzer that will fit. Somehow, this just seems to violate everyone's idea of integrity.

(5) Modify an existing Wurlitzer regulator to fit on the platform. In the end, this seemed like the best solution, especially in view of the fact that we knew of one that would serve to supply nearly everything needed. It satisfies the needs of the console, will fit in the space provided, is original (at least in principle), it utilizes Wurlitzer's brilliant engineering and is roughly the same cubic capacity as a 20" X 30" regulator, which we know will work, based on our brief experience with one of that size in the right location near the console.

Next month, we will cover not only the application of new leather, but also the re-engineering of our surplus Wurlitzer regulator. Stay tuned!





Left:  
Close-up of corner with  
outer gusset removed.

Photo by Joe Granger

*Previous Page:*

*Oblique view of regulator,  
blocked into a fully open  
position, sans springs. It  
may not look pretty, but  
there's loads of potential  
under all of that filth.*

Photo by Joe Granger

*Right:*

*Part of rib section re-  
moved. Note many small  
hinges, as done originally.  
Most of regulator seen still  
intact, as seen on right.*

Photo by Joe Granger







Above:  
Regulator top, upside-down on workbench, as seen from the inside. Ribs and bottom removed.

Photo by Joe Granger



Above:  
Original regulator bottom as seen from the inside. Ribs, top and valve plates all removed. The original air exhaust was the rectangular slot on the right, while the two circular holes were unceremoniously cut in later. Believe it or not, there's wood underneath all of that dirt and coal soot.

Photo by Joe Granger

## We need your help!

With more events at the Senate comes the need for more volunteers. Everything is needed from ticket sellers, ticket takers, concession stand workers, raffle table workers, clean-up crew, and everything else that needs done for each event.

Please contact Lance Luce, Michael Fisher, Dave Calendine or Kevin Werner if you are able to help.  
It would be greatly appreciated!

# B

## uilding Update

Our building is getting tired. Built in 1926, it is the last operating theater out of seventeen that once extended along Michigan Avenue between downtown Detroit and Wyoming. It has served its purpose, and then some. It has been the home of the Detroit Theater Organ Club / Society longer than it served as a local movie house.

Over the past few years several repairs and improvements have been made, such as the new alarm system, repairs to the auditorium walls, and work on the outer masonry walls on both sides of the building. Improvements to the boiler, plumbing

work, and small fixes here and there have continued to be made as well.

Many significant repairs have yet to be made, however, due to the high cost. Several areas in the building are in need of major plaster repair and painting. Many areas outside the building are in need of attention as well. The brick wall by the parking lot needs to be painted. Roof work and gutter repairs await. These repairs are costly, but are necessary in order to keep our building in the condition it needs to be in and to insure its future. We need to take care of our building so that it can continue to house our one-of-a-kind

Wurlitzer. Our building is part of Detroit history, and being one of the longest lasting theater organ clubs in the world, theater organ history as well.

Please help keep our dream alive and consider a donation to the Detroit Theater Organ Society. A list of the projects include:

- \$2,460.00 to paint the parking lot wall
- \$1,800.00 to paint the doors and frames, gutters and downspouts, grey block parking lot wall and bumper posts
- \$2,800.00 to paint the ceiling, walls, handrails etc. of

Kevin Werner

DTOS Board of Directors

the men's restroom stairwell

- \$2,800.00 for painting the same for the ladies restroom.
- \$2,400.00 to paint the inner lobby ceiling and perimeter of the foyer ceiling.
- \$1,900.00 to paint the northeast and northwest emergency exit ceiling, walls, floor, doors and frames.
- \$9,600.00 to fix and replace the leaking plumbing and fixtures in the men's restroom.

Please consider donating to any or all of these projects.

See you at the theater.

# N

## otes from the Editor

I have been a member of the Detroit Theater Organ Society for over a decade now. I have seen some of the best concert artists come in and perform on our prized Wurlitzer. I have watched many things happen other than concerts at our theater as well. With the stage greatly expanded and a large new movie screen, we have had ragtime shows, dance shows, and many great movies. All of this could not have happened without a great support group keeping the Senate alive and going.

One such person that has been supporting the work of the Senate has been Norm Horning. Norm has been selling tickets to the Senate for several years now, always showing up and ready to go before the doors open to everyone. After several years of doing this, Norm has decided to hang up his hat and let someone

else take on this very important task. I would like to thank Norm for all that he has done to help out the Detroit Theater Organ Society. Norm will still be at the theater on concert days, but now he gets to receive a ticket to come in, instead of passing them out! Be sure to stop by and thank Norm for his many years of dedication.

Volunteerism is what has kept this club / society alive for many years. We have a great fall line-up of events, and more are still being added. We need volunteers to man the ticket booths, staff the concession stand, and help us with cleaning up after each show, just to name a few things. Please consider being an active part of our society.

The upcoming schedule for the Senate Theater, as of the printing of this Newsletter, is:

- June 28—Ron Rhode performing on the Mighty

Wurlitzer (our last concert till September)

- September 20—Bill Tandy performing on the Mighty Wurlitzer
- September 27—Boogie Woogie & Ragtime Piano show featuring the artistry of Bob Milne and Perry Price
- October 3—a double feature of Halloween movies with the 1957 film *Curse of the Demon* and the 1981 cult film *The Evil Dead*.
- October 18—Ken Double performing on the Mighty Wurlitzer
- November 15—Nathan Avakian performing on the Mighty Wurlitzer
- November 28—the 1987 movie *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*
- December 6—Our Christmas concert featuring John

Dave Calendine

DTOS Board of Directors

Lauter performing on the Mighty Wurlitzer

Be sure to check out the website of the Detroit Theater Organ Society. We can be found online at [www.dtos.org](http://www.dtos.org). The full schedule of events can be found on our website. For those that play our Wurlitzer, be sure to check the calendar online for availability. Any time that maintenance work is scheduled to be performed, or any other times that the organ may need to be "out of commission" will be blocked off on the calendar so that you know when it is not available to play. We do our best to keep the down-time of the organ to a bare minimum, but there are times when that will need to be done.

Thank you for being a part of the Detroit Theater Organ Society. I hope to see you down at the Senate soon!

DETROIT THEATER  
ORGAN SOCIETY

*Over 50 Years of Entertainment!*

## **Detroit Theater Organ Society**

Dave Calendine, Editor  
DTOS Newsletter  
6424 Michigan Ave.  
Detroit, MI 48210-2957

Phone: (313) 894-0850  
Concert Hotline: (313) 894-4100

---

WE'RE ON THE WEB!

WWW.DTOS.ORG

---

## **2015 Concert Series**

June 28—Ron Rhode

September 20—Bill Tandy

October 18—Ken Double

November 15—Nathan Avakian

December 6—John Lauter



photo: Lance Luce