



Detroit Theater Organ Society

August 2011 Newsletter

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WORK DOES NOT STOP IN THE SUMMER!

Dave Calendine
Editor, DTOS Newsletter

There isn't much music being made at the Senate Theater this summer, but that doesn't mean all is quiet in the theater. Many projects are in the process of being done as this Newsletter is being sent out..

The main project that is happening inside the theater is the remodeling of the stage. This project is one of the biggest taken on by the society in several years. For the past several decades, the organ console and piano have sat in their position on the stage, and everything that has happened in the theater has had to happen around them. When the stage project is done, that will all change.

The project, which is being done for the society for only the cost of the materials with all labor donated (thanks to Connie and Dave Masserant!), will raise the stage to be all on one level, and extend several feet further into the auditorium. Three rows of seats have been removed from the front of the theater.

The organ console and piano will be placed on platforms that will enable the console to be positioned for concerts as well as for rentals, clearing the center of the stage when needed for other organizations that may wish to use our theater.

To do all of this work, the stage has been opened up to uncover the lengthy original cable that goes from the console and piano to the relay room. The cable hasn't been seen in a few decades, but it is still in great condition!

Once the console is moved onto its new platform, the cable will be positioned back under the floor and be protected from any damage. The grand

piano will also be placed on a dolly that will enable it to be moved when needed.

All of this work will enable us to use the theatre for events other than theater organ concerts. Ever since the Senate has re-opened, we have received several calls and visits from organizations that would like to use our smaller theater for their events. This extra income could be most beneficial to our organization and ensure its survival for many years to come.

While this work is being done, the organ will not be available for playing, and for this we apologize. It is too dangerous to get to the console at the time as large parts of the stage are simply just not there! The work will take most of August to complete, and when done, the organ will be placed in its new position and "turned back on" for everyone to play.

You can keep track of when the organ is playable again by visiting our website, www.dtos.org.

Other projects that are happening include installation of new chandeliers throughout the lobbies, outside brick work, and many other small projects too numerous to list.

Don't forget that work sessions continue at the Senate. Be sure to read the restoration update later in this Newsletter. It will have information on the major projects that are happening inside and outside of our Senate Theater.

Thank you for your continued interest in the Detroit Theater Organ Society. I look forward to seeing you again in September when many of our members will be performing at the Members Concert.

REPAIRS NEEDED FOR RECORDING MICROPHONES

Fred Bruflodt
DTOS Recording Engineer

DTOS is facing a costly repair to restore its pair of rare, tube-type Neumann condenser microphones to proper working condition. The DTOS Board says the costs could be more than \$500, and support for this unexpected expense is welcome

The microphones were sent to the Neumann US headquarters in Connecticut for inspection and repair mainly because one of them was producing more background noise (hiss) than normal. The technicians confirmed this and said that the vacuum tube needs to be replaced in order to restore it to normal operation. This would be the part to be replaced in these microphones.

Because these are vintage microphones, the Neumann repair center can no longer obtain a new tube from Germany. Replacement tubes are available

used from eBay and other sources. Because they are rare, costs are typically \$500 and up. New tubes are no longer being manufactured in Germany or elsewhere.

These microphones are highly regarded for their sound quality and were acquired in the late 1960s or early 1970s by the late Ted Amano, who was responsible for DTOS recordings from the opening of the Senate Theater until his passing.

Maintaining a high level of audio quality is important for our archive recordings and for those who make their own recordings from "the back row" or purchase CD copies.

If you have any questions regarding the microphones, please contact Fred Bruflodt for more details. fred.audioarts@prodigy.net

MEMBERS CONCERT IN SEPTEMBER

Dave Calendine
Editor, DTOS Newsletter

It is time for members to start polishing up on their favorite selections as September brings our annual Members Concert to the Senate Theater.

The Members Concert is a departure from our normal formal concert series. Instead of bringing in an artist for the afternoon, several different members will be presenting "mini concerts" of their favorite selections on our prized Wurlitzer.

We are looking for some of the members that might be interested in being a part of the Members Concert. We ask that you prepare two to four selections to play during the concert.

If you are interested in being a part of the Members Concert, please contact Lance Luce and let



him know. Lance can be reached at lanceluce@wowway.com.

RENOVATIONS UPDATE

Connie Masserant
Restoration Extraordinaire

Our journey continues as we carry on with beautifying and restoring of our lady, The Senate.

This last month much has taken place. We began with the installation of 3 chandeliers in the refreshments' area.

The fixtures were first installed by David Masserant and Lance Luce...



...only to be followed by the placement of each crystal by Michael Fisher, Lance, George, and Connie.

At the end of a long day, we had a beautiful



new room and with the help of the mirrors, we had lights reflecting wherever you looked.

The next two projects were started simultaneously, the brick work and the preparation for the expansion of the stage.

Though the last two weeks temperatures spiked to the 90's and 100's, our brick layers showed up for work every day until the job was completed.

The picture below shows how the pilaster looked before the work had begun. You can see why we had water problems. Notice the top.



But after several days of tearing down the outside layer of brick and building it back up, it once again began to look like new. Followed by some stucco work and a new paint job, no one would have ever suspected it was in such bad disrepair. To the left is the pilaster with outer layer being removed.

RENOVATIONS UPDATE ... continued from previous page

To the right is the project completed. View the right side of the downspout...notice the nice cement cap on top....No more water here!



With that completed, we turned our focus to the stage expansion which will allow us to market and



stage additional events, thus generating much needed income for the Society.

The preparation began by first removing a portion of seats from the first 3 rows in the auditorium. This was done by the help of Dave Masserant and Connie along with Lynn Walls.

With the seats re-

moved, the contractors were able to come in and survey so as to know how to proceed with the 8 foot expansion. I must tell you that we were graced with these contractors as they are completing this project for only the cost of the materials -



NO labor cost.

First, preparations needed to be made to move the console. In doing so, part of the floor was to be removed so the cables that run to the console could be repositioned.

Tile came up followed by plywood sheeting then planking. Remaining were the 2 x 6's, when removed would allow us to reposition the organ cables.





Spaghetti, anyone.....?

The next step was preparing the new location for the cables.

The stage is expected to be completed close to the end of August. Needless to say, with all of the construction of the stage, it isn't safe to be near or on it. So with that being said, there will be no availability to practice/play the Wurlitzer until further notice—probably by the end of the month.

Sorry if this inconveniences anyone, but your safety comes first. Please watch the reservation list on DTOS.org to see when availability opens up. We will keep you posted there.

Of course we have to have a little fun while we work. Lance was a little low and felt the need to get charged up.



There is still much work ahead...some of which doesn't require physical labor. As I have said in the past, we need more volunteers. If it appears in these pictures that it is always the same people—that's because it *IS* always the same people that show up to contribute their help. With over 100 members, it would seem that we could get more than a handful to help out. This is your club of which we hope you enjoy and it is also your club to contribute in any way that you can. Soon there will be a calendar posted on our website that will let you know when we have work sessions and what we will be doing. You can always contact me to find out or confirm any work session at my gmail address or phone. Gmail: cmasserant13@gmail.com or 734-652-6004 See you at the Senate!

UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE REDFORD THEATRE

August 19 & 20—Sabrina

September 9 & 10—The Treasure of Sierra Madre

September 23 & 24—National Velvet

September 30 & October 1 —Second Annual Classic Animation Festival

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—Walt Strony - Christmas Under the Stars

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

Interested in getting the Newsletter electronically?

Notify Dave Calendine at dave@calendine.net

YOU ARE INVITED!

Board Meetings are held on the last Tuesday of every month. Meetings start at 7:00 p.m.

Come and be an active member of your organization!

FROM THE BENCH

Scott Smith
The Question

The question, while coming from a then-member of the board who needed to do little to get on my nerves, was cogent and clear. The question, while vibrating the marrow in my bones, was a legitimate one. The question, while wanting to avoid it, required an answer. The question was: can anyone here tell me what is so great about this original 1920s relay and combination action that makes it too sacred to change?

There was a moment of nervous contemplation, followed by a rushing torrent of opinions that seemed to have no merit to the questioner. To him, the view was simple. Hack out that old relay and replace it with some new electronic gadget that can hold dozens and dozens of memory levels. To him, it would dramatically increase the amount of playing time the organ gets. Everyone could have their own memory and be happy with their combinations. To him, there was nothing emotional about keeping the original relay and combination action intact and working. So who cares if it's original or not? It still sounds the same. When the noise level returned to a dull roar, I tried to interject my simple mantra on matters of this sort: It's always clear to us where to start changing an organ, but never clear where to stop. Plain and simple, that's "it" in a nutshell.

As you probably know by now, the Fisher Wurlitzer was the eighth largest organ built by the North Tonawanda firm for installation into a theatre, and the tenth largest theatre organ by any maker. Here's the short list of Wurlitzer organs that preceded it in terms of size:

- 1) Radio City Music Hall, New York, New York - 4 manuals, 58 ranks
- 2) Fox Theatre, Brooklyn, New York - 4 manuals, 37 ranks
- 3 - 6) New York Paramount, New York, New York - 4 manuals, 36 ranks
- Fox Theatre, Detroit Michigan - 4 manuals, 36 ranks
- Fox Theatre, St. Louis, Missouri - 4 manuals, 36 ranks

Fox Theatre, San Francisco, California - 4 manuals, 36 ranks

- 7) Center Theatre, New York, New York - 4 manuals, 34 ranks

- 8) Fisher Theatre, Detroit, Michigan - 4 manuals, 34 ranks

The Center Wurlitzer outdistanced the Fisher only by a nose. It had the same number of ranks, but the Centre had more pipes per rank, especially in the trebles. This would be a carryover from Kimball, who allegedly handed over all of the business for the pipe organs in Rockefeller Center to Wurlitzer, who desperately needed the work in 1932. Kimball was known for adding in "blind octaves" which could only be accessed via the super coupler. In fact, even their smallest organs often had Concert Flutes whose range was 101 notes instead of the usual 97. Why, you ask? So that if one engaged the 1-3/5' Tierce, the pipes would go all the way to the top of the keyboard instead of stopping midway up that last octave. We don't want our organists to be disappointed, do we?

In the nearly eighty years since those eight specific Wurlitzer instruments were built, there have been changes and there have been casualties. Radio City no longer has its famous double relay (one for each console), having gone to electronic switching due to the theatre's perceived need for more dressing room space in recent years. One of the consoles has reportedly been respecified. The Brooklyn Fox organ, having been pilfered somewhat while still in the theatre and having undergone something of a legal battle since removal has sadly gone to parts. The Center Theatre organ had a brief life in a rolling skating rink following removal, but it, too has gone to parts, and is now scattered to the winds. The New York Paramount's console burned in a fire shortly after arriving at its new home in Wichita's Century II Convention Center along with a piano and several large pipes. It was replaced with an all-new console that differs a bit from the original, but certainly plays well with a revised and enlarged specification. In

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

the years since, an electronic relay has replaced the original which still rests in silent repose in the center's basement. During the Forties, while back in the theatre, the Paramount Studio (the "upstairs organ") Wurlitzer's English Posthorn was substituted for one of the four Vox Humanas by organist George Wright. Apparently, the original one wasn't enough. The Vox has since been returned to service, bumping the Posthorn onto its own chest and gaining a new non-Wurlitzer name of "Fanfare Trumpet." Somewhere along the line, an Unda Maris was added to complement the Dulciana, bringing the total number of ranks to thirty-eight. The second marimba was swapped out with one from a local Wurlitzer, and the second Chrysoglott was modified into a Vibraphone. The low five 32' Diaphone pipes have never been reinstalled in Wichita, due to space limitations. Several ranks from the St. Louis Fox organ were either loaned or given to a famous organist who was building a studio organ for recording back in the Fifties. Only recently have there been attempts to either locate the original sets (assuming they even exist) or replace them with suitable vintage replacements, or so it has been reported. The San Francisco Fox organ has been reinstalled in the much-smaller El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood with an electronic relay and electric stop actions, plus some "temporary" swapping out of pipes here and there throughout the organ by one of the organists; all of the swapping totally and easily reversible, we are told. That brings us to the Detroit organs from the Fox and the Fisher, neither of which has suffered the fates of so many other of the larger breed of Wurlitzer organs. Both operate on their original relays with their original air-powered combination actions. Some very minor changes have occurred in both instruments, but far fewer than most of their contemporaries.

I've often said that the public theatre organs in most any community tend to reflect the state, the mentality and the personality of the city in which they are installed. One can speculate in any way they wish about our largest and most financially successful cities, where real estate holds a higher value than anything built on it, versus those like Detroit whose local economy has

forced the community to develop a state of mind that causes its inhabitants to treasure what they have because, well...they have to. There is no other workable choice. Furthermore, there is a recognition that they have something of value that is worth hanging onto and not changing because it was clearly a good idea in the first place. Simple objectivity rears its head when all else fails, especially when the economics of the situation dictate accordingly. Another reason is the practice of adaptation that economically disadvantaged cities are particularly good at, again, because they have to. Buildings made for one purpose become something completely different over time; sometimes change several times, but they remain because the "bones" of the building were good enough to build upon time and again. People in these types of urban areas tend to hunker down and develop a certain sense of tenacity (a nice word for stubbornness), and a respectful, but deep-seated mistrust of outsiders.

The larger question beyond that of the relay, is: why preserve at all? It's a valid one, and I don't think there is any singular nor simple answer to it. For me, the answer goes beyond practicality, beyond anything else we can conjure up because it's politically expedient or correct. There is something about the shared experience that we all want to retain, but something that goes well beyond that into the very core of our spiritual and emotional selves. Perhaps the greatest thing about a perfectly preserved pipe organ is that, for all intents and purposes, it sounds essentially just like it did in the theatre. It's the last thing remaining intact from a much-loved building that is long gone, where people sat in the dark and thrilled to the majesty of its rich tones. We can hear it, just as the patrons heard it then. It operates just exactly as it did on opening night. We can thrill to it today, just as they did. That's a hard concept to convey if you've never experienced it, and even harder to sell to someone who is determined to be indifferent or even hostile to the sound of a pipe organ. Simply put, if they don't know, you can't tell 'em.

I've been coming to concerts at the Senate Theatre since I was fifteen years old. In that time, there have been no end of self-appointed experts from

around the country (and the world) who think they can somehow magically "improve" the Fisher Wurlitzer (as if it actually needed improvement). Perhaps the biggest target for these types has been the way the specification is laid out on the console. The loudmouths think it should be either changed to Wurlitzer standard, or (now get this) we should have a second console built with a specification representing today's perceived Wurlitzer standard, and leave the original console in the lobby as furniture to be admired only and not played (hey - you can't make this stuff up!). Somewhere about this time, they also point out how "gaudy" the console is to their jaded eyes (as if we cared, and by the way, who died and left them to judge good taste?). I endured years of this (as if I had anything to say about it anyway), and thought it had pretty much passed, but not long ago, I was engaged to play a concert in a city some distance away. My host during my stay was a longtime friend and colleague who knew the Fisher organ well, and I was certainly surprised and frankly, taken aback by his comments that seemed to come out of thin air when the inevitable subject of The Club and the Wurlitzer came up:

The Friend: So just when are those people going to get around to making that stoprail right?

Scott: Come again?

TF: I mean, when are they going to make that thing standard? C'mon, now. Enough is enough! That thing is so hard to play!

At this point, I understood clearly that "those people" meant the board and the membership. The tone of his voice was tinged with a touch of sarcasm, and the small pilot light in the back of my mind shot to full flame, like a furnace on a cold day.

SS: Oh, boo hoo! You and all of the other crybabies need to get over yourselves!

TF (obviously surprised at my outburst): Wh-wh-what?

SS (annoyed): Anybody on the planet good enough to play for DTOS should already know what they're in for before they get to Detroit. If they can't come a day early to get acquainted with it, they get no sympathy from me, and probably no one else in the club, either!

TF (clearing throat, looking for a way out): Oh, uh-hh, you feel that strongly about it, do you?

SS (by now getting hot under the collar): Assuming you could even get the membership to go along with this stupid idea, do you have any idea what a monumental undertaking that would be? Do you?

I should have learned long ago what hunters already knew: stare down your prey and they'll either eat you or back off. There are times I think some of the people who profess to love the organ the most bunny hug it to death. I let my friend off easy because we've known each other for a long time, but had he continued to press the point, I might have been tempted to draw all of the oxygen out of the room just for myself, and launch into a lengthy tirade about the importance of preservation. Would he have gotten it? I really can't say, but I think he knows now how passionately I feel about the importance of preserving historic pipe organs (particularly the Fisher Wurlitzer) and incorporating their use into whatever events or functions that we are able. If we don't, they'll just slip away, and we'll all muse about why "they" couldn't save them.

I'll bet you're like I am. The things I miss the most are 1) those things I threw away whose purpose I didn't understand, 2) those things I threw away that I knew I'd never use again, and 3) those things I passed up at the store or in a catalog or on the Internet that I can no longer get. Preservation is a lot like that. Buildings, pipe organs and other items whose initial purpose may have passed are often cast aside in favor of "progress," and by the time we realize our mistake, it's too late. My Dad used to say "you've got to make way for progress!" I tend to think he meant that sarcastically, although in my house, he was the tosser and my Mom was the keeper. Like a lot of men from his generation, I think he pretended not to be sentimental about anything, but I know that down deep, he was a sensitive man who appreciated old things, old buildings and old ideas. Apparently, not wanting to show weakness or sentimentality, he tossed many things out indiscriminately. Sure wish I still had some of that stuff. Oh, well...it's gone now. No matter what it is, restoration often costs more than building new, no matter what it is, but when reasonable people are in charge of the decision-making, restoration and preservation win out. Some things are just worth keeping because they remind us of the importance of continuity. Over the past couple of years, one of the buildings on the campus of

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

the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor came down in favor of a much larger replacement. The architecture of the new building is actually rather old-fashioned, and it fits into its surroundings well. As the old Carnegie Library building was being demolished, I was astonished to see the care taken in preserving the old carved sandstone facade. It stood free and untouched, while the entire rest of the building was taken down around it. The facade stood there for months, while workmen carefully constructed a new building behind it, and now it stands as a reminder of the former building that once stood there. No one will regret the decision to keep it, no matter how much it cost.

Most of us either are or were raised by Depression children. Because I spent so much time with my maternal grandparents growing up, I tell people I was raised by two generations of Depression children. Going to their house was like going to an unstructured museum. I was never bored there. The attic, the main floor, the basement and even the garage were all filled to the top with books and interesting artifacts. Based on the estimates of several book dealers, my grandmother had amassed a personal library of around 14,000 books in her basement. Over a period of several decades, my grandfather's workshop was slowly reduced to the size of a phone booth. Doubtless, it's where I developed an affinity for reading, writing and language. More than any artistic event I ever attended, exposure to that atmosphere over a period of several years was key to my appreciation for preservation and conservation. You may be interested to learn that one of our longtime DTOS members has a daughter who was raised in a similar atmosphere, and she is now a curator at the Henry Ford Museum. Obviously it affected her outlook on life, too. There's more to getting young people interested in the organs than just an appreciation for the music. Exposure to old things of value and developing a respect for them is equally important. Studies tell us that exposure to the arts when we are young doesn't have nearly the impact as what our friends think and do when we're in our adult years. However, I do believe fervently that early exposure to preservation and conservation does have a definite

impact. The words "preservation" and "respect" are almost interchangeable in this instance.

Perhaps a goodly portion of the lack of historical perspective suffered by our society can be blamed on the fact that we are so young. It's obvious that respect for history is a major building block of cultures around the world. History, culture, traditions and values are all a part of what makes a nation or a society what it is. Unlike older nations, ours is known for being a mix of other cultures, supposedly tolerated and respected by other inhabitants. It has been said that we are more of a "salad bowl" than a "mixing bowl," where we are all together, but retain our own cultural values and beliefs. Unfortunately, our nation has become so intoxicated with its own financial success that we tend to stomp on that which came from an earlier time, when education, literature, art, beauty and yes, history were held as some of our highest values. The movie theatres and the organs were victims of shifting values. So many have been destroyed in the name of "progress." I probably don't need to tell you about the changes that have been and will continue to happen. The old saying that "those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it" still rings true.

The best kind of preservation and conservation happen right under our noses without notice. As I like to say, a craftsman has done his job when you can't tell what it is he's done, especially when it comes to restoration. In the process of maintaining the Fisher Wurlitzer, there are times, albeit rare when things simply have to be replaced. If at all possible, and the item is not considered to be perishable, we go whatever lengths necessary to make sure that everything along this line is from another vintage Wurlitzer organ, just as our predecessors did. The next time you go on a chamber tour, make sure to check out the screws you see holding components together. They're all slotted, as they were from Day One, and while in recent years the world has turned its back on these fine fasteners and poke fun at us fuddy-duddies who still use them, you will find no Phillips, no hex, no star tool and no square drives in the organ. Only slotted, and most of them vintage slotted. It may be a fine detail that doesn't affect

the sound of the organ, but it is an inherent part of this most historic of Wurlitzers. The best organ leathers available are carefully selected to emulate those which were in the organ originally, and are applied not by the latest-and-greatest-gee-whiz glue, but by old-fashioned hide glue, which is not as easy to come by as it once was, but available and desirable by nearly all musical instrument restorers for various reasons. White glue and RTV silicone have no place in the Fisher Wurlitzer. I think by now, you can tell the level of respect we hold for this fabulous, unique instrument and hope to continue to do so indefinitely.

Some people think we worship the Fisher Wurlitzer as a "thing" and can't get our heads out of the past, but I submit that those who constantly preach change in the organ are incapable of thinking beyond their own thoughts and have intentionally planted their heads someplace dark and unpleasant. Just like those who have come before us, we who maintain the organ realize that the organ is not ours to own, but ours to maintain and protect. It goes deep. About five or so years ago, a friend of over thirty years who lives across the country decided all on his own that the DTOS should rip out that old relay and replace it with a solid state unit instead of restoring it. Our polite disagreement escalated into a fierce email battle in which he threatened to do what he had to do to get the club to accept his arrogant, singleminded idea. Luckily, the then-president of the club merely asked if the man was

a club member, and when I said he was not, he simply said, "End of discussion." It was a sigh of relief for me, but my old friend and I no longer speak to each other. True, there were other issues that were brewing between us, but his attempt to do an end-run around me was the beginning of the end. If nothing else, despite our years of friendship, I wanted him to know that he could not bully me or us, and that my loyalties were well-founded and most of all, they were here. The same goes for anyone else.

Every day, the Fisher Wurlitzer redefines itself as a member of a unique fraternity; that of a large, unaltered theatre organ. During its mere 83 years of existence, hundreds of other Wurlitzers and organs from competing firms have been broken up, left to rot, gone to the scrappers or worst of all, to the landfill. Hundreds. Think of it. It is known literally across the world, and has rightfully earned a definable, recognizable place in the history of the Golden Era of the motion picture palace. In the ten-volume set of Time-Life books from the 1970s, entitled "This Fabulous Century," the only theatre organ console to appear on any of its pages was that from the Fisher Wurlitzer.

Now, as to "The Answer" to "The Question," all I can say is that when we remove an integral part of something we hold so dear, it loses an important part of its basic identity; something that makes it unique and complete. Plain and simple. Do we really want to do that here??



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

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