

DETROIT THEATER ORGAN SOCIETY

A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

Senate Theater • 6424 Michigan Avenue • Detroit, MI 48210

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What's New?

The man who Laughs!

Join us on Feb 8th at 8pm for the classic silent movie The Man who Laughs with our own Lance Luce providing the accompaniment.

The Man Who Laughs is a 1928 American silent romantic film directed by the German Expressionist filmmaker Paul Leni. The film is an adaptation of Victor Hugo's novel of the same name and stars Mary Philbin as the blind DEA and Conrad Veidt as Gwynplaine. The film is known for the grim carnival freak-like grin on the character Gwynplaine's face, which often leads it to be classified as a horror film.^[1] Film critic Roger Ebert stated, "*The Man Who Laughs*" is a melodrama, at



times even a swashbuckler, but so steeped in Expressionist gloom that it plays like a horror film.

In 1680s England, King James II sentences his political enemy, Lord Clancharlie, to death in an iron maiden. Clancharlie's son, Gwynplaine, is disfigured with a permanent grin by comprachico Dr. Hardquannone, so that he will "laugh forever at his fool of a father". When the comprachicos are exiled, Gwynplaine is deserted in the snow. He discovers a blind baby girl, Dea, whose mother has died of hypothermia. Together, they are taken in by the mountebank Ursus.

Years later, a now-adult Gwynplaine has become the Laughing Man, the freak show star of a traveling carnival. He and Dea have also fallen in love; he remains distant, believing himself unworthy of her affection due to his disfigurement, although she cannot see it. Meanwhile, the jester Barkilphedro, who had been involved in Lord Clancharlie's execution, is now attached to the court of Queen Anne. He discovers records that reveal Gwynplaine's lineage and rightful inheritance. That estate is currently

possessed by sexually aggressive vamp Duchess Josiana.

On an evening of Gwynplaine's show performance, Josiana attends, but does not laugh with the rest of the crowd, as she is attracted to Gwynplaine's disfigurement. After the show, she requests his presence to her room that night and attempts to seduce him, but he rejects her advances and flees. He returns to Dea and lets her touch his disfigured face. She accepts him by saying: "God closed my eyes so I could see the real Gwynplaine!", and the couple express their love for one another. Later the queen's guards arrest Gwynplaine and, to stop his friends from looking for him, they fake his death,



leaving Dea, Ursus and his friends heartbroken. Then, the group are ordered to leave England by Barkilphedro.

Queen Anne grants Gwynplaine his peerage and a seat in the House of Lords, and orders Josiana to marry him, in order to restore the proper ownership of the estate. Ultimately, Gwynplaine renounces his title, and refuses the Queen's order of marriage. He escapes, pursued by guards in a chase punctuated by swordplay. He arrives at the docks and is happily reunited with Dea and Ursus on their ship. Together, they all sail away from England.

The film is thus given a more upbeat ending than that of Hugo's novel, in which both Dea and Gwynplaine die at the end.



From The Bench:

Recorded history (Scott Smith)

Over the past 60 years, more than 700 concerts have been presented by the Detroit Theatre Organ Society. Virtually all of those have been recorded in some manner for "archival purposes." Some of those have actually made their way onto commercial recordings at a later date. Right from the start, these moments of musical enjoyment have been captured with the finest of equipment available in order to re-live those moments later. It's a testament to the

dedication to excellence in every way from the very beginning.

I attend a diverse range of musical events, and in each of those, I look for a couple of moments of musical thrills when the performer is really communicating. Despite the others in the room, those are very personal

moments for me that, under the right circumstances, go directly to my core. Second to that are recordings



of those events I attended that helped me revisit those moments.

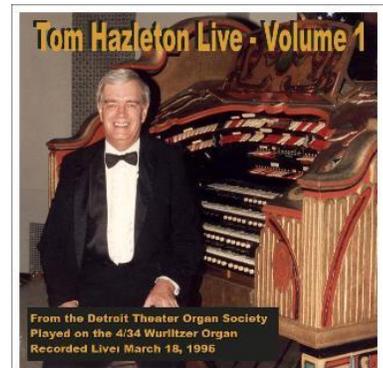
Behind that are recorded events that I did not attend but wish I could have. While commercial sound recordings have thrills of their own kind, there's just something about that shared experience with others that just seems to amplify those moments of sheer joy. There's an excitement in the room for the performer(s) that, under the right circumstances, excites the audience, too. As an organist myself, being able to examine and dissect those recordings through repeated listening often acted as mini-music lessons that helped shape who and

what I am today.

There are those dedicated individuals who populate "Recording Row" in the back of the orchestra level of the Senate Theatre during the concerts. This is a tradition that goes back to the very beginning of the organization. They may appear to have the worst seat in the house for the concerts, but the later enjoyment of those concerts often proves to be worth it for those involved.

There exist some much-prized recordings of events that took place, even in those early days that would have been but a memory for those in attendance had someone not had a machine running. There were some that were "official," like those by Ashley Miller, Pearl White and John Muri, and some that were impromptu, like the Christmas-themed visit by the eminent Virgil Fox.

There were those artists who were recorded but insisted that they be allowed to edit selections "out" if



they felt the performance was not up to their personal standard, and there's at least one that was recorded, but the club's official tape is mysteriously missing-in-action. I can only speculate that someone simply "forgot" to return it.

Sadly, there were those that could not be recorded because of recording contract obligations. Those include Richard Liebert and George Wright, who even insisted that the microphones be taken down for his concerts. We'll never know how they sounded in the confines of our little clubhouse, and I consider that a loss, but they're both gone and that's that.

This extends further to books and sheet music. Ten years ago, it was predicted that we would be spending our reading hours entirely on a Kindle or some such device, and that by now, libraries would be a thing of the past. That whole premise hasn't exactly gained much traction yet, nor has it gone away completely. I suspect it will stay that way indefinitely. Conversely, finding a store that sells a wide variety of sheet music that you can actually look through has declined slowly and steadily over the years. As in the case of books, much can be found on the Internet, but not everything. The Internet provides convenience when searching for something specific, but nothing can replace the experience of thumbing through a stack of old sheet music in the hope of finding a rare gem.



Now that I have reached "a certain age," I'm thinking more and more about what I leave behind, since I can't take any of it with me. Among my most prized possessions are my books, my music and my recordings of musical events. I'm going to do my best to see to it that these land in the hands of those who will cherish them as I have, and if they don't, maybe they'll hang onto them long enough that one day, their minds may be changed, or they'll pass them onto someone who will appreciate them. Fingers crossed.

A few years back, the family of one of our longtime members contacted me regarding their deceased patriarch's collection of recordings. I agreed to take it on, and they were happy to let me disperse the lot as I saw fit.

Our meeting time was not possible to coordinate, so I suggested they leave it on my front porch. I assumed it might be a few DTOS concert tapes and a handful of CDs. Imagine my surprise when I found my front porch completely covered with brown paper grocery sacks filled with LPs, open reel tapes, cassette tapes, and compact discs. It took many evenings of sorting and documenting before I really knew what I had. Ultimately, I donated the whole lot to DTOS to be sold at a fundraising event. It may not have brought us a huge amount of money, but it was worth the effort, and others are now enjoying those same recordings again.

Another club member died suddenly, and there were numerous tapes of value in his collection, and some that were the property of others. I took it upon myself to go after his collection of recordings and let us just say that while the surviving family had absolutely no interest in the collection, they proved to be rather difficult to work with. Who was I? How did I know their relative? Frankly, it became annoying to have to explain who I am and how I fit into the deceased's life with each communication, and believe me, there were many. Finally, after doggedly pestering them over the period of a year, they boxed up everything that resembled a recording in exasperation and told me to come get it all. When it was finally loaded, the boxes completely filled my truck bed plus all the interior of the cab that didn't include me. Again, there was sorting over a period of weeks, documentation, and dispersal. I know for a fact that he had a substantial collection of 7" open reel tapes of some theatre organ events that took place in the Detroit area in the 1960s and 1970s that somehow vanished. Initially, I had offered help to the family in

an effort to thwart the possible destruction of some rare and potentially valuable recordings, but they were suspicious of me and my motives from the beginning, and it never happened. Like so many people, I'm certain that these folks thought that open reel tapes were a thing of the past, and no one would want those old things. I'm also certain those tapes are in the landfill by now.

So, let me please urge those of you who have not done so to think about what's going to become of your archive. Remember that DTOS concert tapes "should" only be owned by a Playing Member in good standing. There are some substantial collections of concert tapes out there, and all of us need to think about what happens after the inevitable. What it comes down to is this: we need to start transferring those things directly to the person(s) of choice now (which is the surer method, based on my experience), or make provisions in your will for your intended gift, and hope that it will, actually happen. The same is true of sheet and book music, books in general, and valued possessions. I'm also perfectly aware that there are those who do not care about what happens to their possessions once they're gone, but I'd like to think they are in the minority. I'd prefer to cling to the notion that our members are caring people. Our club wouldn't have made it to age 60 if we hadn't.

Be they recordings, books, music or the organs themselves, it's important to point out that we are the custodians of these important pieces of Americana. Once they're gone...they're gone...forever. As an old friend used to say, "Fine things are not yours to keep...just yours to take care of."

The Widening of Michigan Avenue

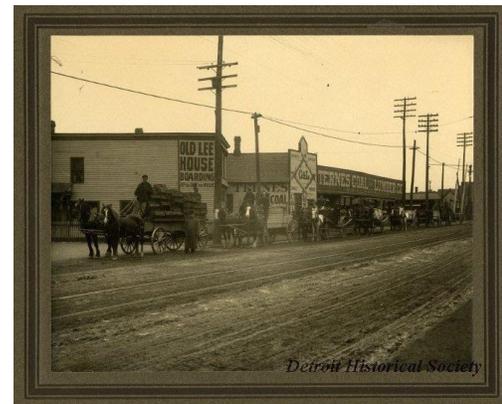
Buildings were demolished between 1938-1939 to allow Michigan Avenue's expansion.

Courtesy Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University.

If you drive down Michigan Avenue closer to down town often, you have probably noticed that every surviving 19th century building on it lies on the north side of the street. This is the result of a massive road-widening project that occurred in the late 1930s that entailed the condemnation of property on the avenue's south side. Half of the Victorian-era buildings on Corktown's main commercial thoroughfare were lost in this one event.



Print. Mounted, sepia-toned photographic print depicting seven horse-drawn delivery carts lined up in front of Ternes Coal and Lumber Company, 6132 Michigan Avenue. The carts are stacked with wooden logs or boards, and each is attended by a driver. Five other people, including a well-dressed man in a hat and coat pose along with the carts. Old Lee House Boarding is adjacent to Ternes. Streetcar tracks are visible in the street at the bottom of the frame. This is next to where the old fire house sits. From what I have gathered the fire house was built around 1880. This has not been confirmed however. This is approximately three blocks east of Livernois. (Photo above circa 1880 courtesy of Detroit News archives) (Photo to the right courtesy of google)





(Photo courtesy of the Detroit News archives)

Black and white photographic print depicting a Walker & Co. billboard displaying an advertisement for Coca-Cola reading, "'You taste its quality', Drink Coca-Cola". In view is traffic and parked cars on Michigan Avenue (U.S. 112), facing west at Livernois Avenue. Businesses on the south side of the street include John's Show Repairing Shop, Peoples Lunch, and Michigan Furniture. On the north side of the street are the Senate Theater, Senate Furniture, Kaplan Hardware, and a Dodge-Plymouth service center. Dated 11-3-1941



*Looking northeast to Trumbull and Michigan Avenue in the 1880s.
The three-story building near the center still stands at 1416-32 Michigan Ave. Courtesy
Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.*



Jan 25	8pm.	Ann Arbor Film Festival	\$5.00
Feb 8	8pm.	The Man Who Laughs (Silent) Lance Luce Organist.	\$10.00
Feb 15	8pm.	Grease-with vintage clothing pop up (1978)	\$5.00
Feb 28	8pm.	Beat the Devil (Friday show) (1954)	\$5.00
Feb 29	8pm.	The Maltese Falcon (1941)	\$5.00
Mar 7	8pm.	King Kong (1933)	\$5.00
Mar 21	8pm.	They Live (1988)	\$5.00
Mar 28	8pm.	Metropolis (Silent) Scott Smith Organist.	\$10.00
April 19	3pm.	Mark Herman in concert.	\$15.00
May 17	3pm.	Lance Luce in concert	\$15.00

We'd love to hear from you. Questions, Suggestions... We even take requests!! Our Board of Directors are here to serve you. Email them at:

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