



Detroit Theater Organ Society

June 2011 Newsletter

Volume 50, Issue 5

JOHN LAUTER RETURNS TO THE SENATE

Senate Theater

Sunday, June 12, 2011 3:00 p.m.

Detroit native John Lauter has been presenting theatre organ concerts for over 20 years.

John made his public debut at the Redford theatre at age 16. Since those early days John has presented concerts in Chicago at the Oriental theatre, VanderMolen residence studio, Krughoff residence studio, the 19th Hole restaurant and the St. Mary of the Lake Seminary auditorium in Mundelein.

Lauter has been featured in programs at the Paramount theatre in Denver, the Castro theatre in San Francisco, the Richard Knight auditorium of Babson College in Boston, the Organ Stop Pizza restaurant in Phoenix, the Rialto theatre in Joliet, IL, and the Palace theatre in Marion, Ohio.

The Ohio theatre in Columbus featured John in overtures to their popular classic film series.

John played concerts in Toronto at Casa Loma, in King-

ston, Ontario at the Kingston Theatre Organ Society's Kimball organ, the Public Museum of Grand Rapids (Michigan), the Little River Studio Wurlitzer in Wichita, Kansas, the Auditorium theatre in Rochester, NY, and the Thomaston Opera House in Connecticut, an appearance that also found John combining forces with the Waterbury Youth Symphony.

Lauter was a featured performer at the American Theatre Organ Society's 2009 convention in Cleveland.

John spent three years playing at "Theatre Organ Pizza and Pipes" in Pontiac, Michigan.

At home in Detroit, John has presented nine concerts at the Detroit Theatre Organ Society and many concerts and silent film programs at the Redford theatre.

The Michigan theatre in Ann Arbor, Michigan featured John as staff organist for 17 years during which



JOHN LAUTER IN CONCERT ... continued from the first page

John accompanied such silent film classics as **Metropolis**, **The Birth of a Nation**, **The Phantom of the Opera**, **IT**, **Robin Hood**, **Greed**, **The Big Parade**, **Nosferatu**, **The Gold Rush** and many others.

The Detroit Fox theatre's 1988 re-opening found John playing before **Frank Sinatra**, **Liza Minnelli**, **Sammy Davis Jr.: The Ultimate Event**. Lauter has played at the Fox ever since for film and live shows.

Lauter has used the theatre organ in very traditional roles as a solo and silent film accompaniment instrument, in addition to other unique combinations - with big bands, a Bluegrass-Fiddle band and behind vocalists and instrumentalists.

In preparation for the opening of their new IMAX theatre, the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn contracted John to compose and record a silent film accompaniment to a silent film collage featured in a specially produced IMAX short subject shown before

each feature there.

In February 2010, John was a musical guest on NPR's popular **Prairie Home Companion** program. Host Garrison Keillor remarked, "the man (Lauter) has unerring good taste". Lauter performed solos on the live broadcast and joined forces with PHC's "guys all-star shoe band" for some numbers. The show was performed live before 5,000 people and broadcast live into 4 million homes.

A recent appearance at the Shanklin Music Hall in Groton, Massachusetts with the "White Heat Sextet" was very well received.

John is the organist for the Unity Church of Lake Orion and is also in demand as a pianist at local Detroit restaurants.

John lives in Farmington Hills, Michigan with his wife Amy, son Benjamin and daughter Maryanna.



REMINISING JELANI'S CONCERT

Gil Francis
DTOS Board of Directors

The May 15th concert featuring Jelani Eddington was not only a very beautiful performance of theatre organ music. It brought together a large audience of music lovers that wondered what this Senate Theater was going to be like.

I talked with many people who were very pleased with the new look. They liked the clean and bright appearance of the lobbies, and the homey look of the "living room" type furniture.

Many new people were surprised that a real

theater and an outstanding organ still existed, and is being cared for by volunteers. Maybe some will join our organization.

Many old friends and fellow members were happy to be together again to hear the 4/34 Wurlitzer once more.

I hope members will continue to bring guests to enjoy our theater home and the great performances we have scheduled.

Gil Francis

THEATER RENOVATION UPDATE

Connie Masserant
DTOS Board of Directors

Phase I was completed with Great Success! We have newly painted walls in the Concession, area, Inner Lobby, and the Foyer along with about 20 newly painted doors. Whew!!



And all this is complimented with freshly hung wall paper and numerous pieces of furniture, along with a grand piano.



Our reopening was a big success with members and guests meandering around looking at all that we accomplished in just three short months.



Be sure to look around. There is something new to see throughout the entire theater!

THEATER RENOVATIONS ... *continued from previous page*

The floors in the concession and outer lobby are once again shining only to be reflected in our newly hung mirrors which were so generously donated.



The concession stand has a new look above it as well with the replacement of the overhang, and the installation of new light fixtures. The stand has also been restocked with new goodies to purchase while you are enjoying the great concerts!



With all of that work done, it is now time to re-group and move to PHASE 2! There is still much work to be done. We will continue with interior painting as well as repairs. We will be working some Saturdays. If you are interested in working on Saturday, check with me to make sure we will be working that particular day.

In addition to the regular renovation work, we have some big items that need to be addressed. I am sure those of you who were at the concert noticed that our auditorium needs a face lift. Even though we have a new ceiling, we are in desperate need of wall repair and painting. Before this can happen, however, we need to address some brick issues on the outside of the building which are causing the inside issues.

We will begin to replace one of the pilasters, or pillars of brick, soon.

However, your support is needed. We will be setting up a building fund to filter your donations to help with the project. If you would like to donate, you may either send a check to DTOS 6424 Michigan Ave. Detroit, Mi 48210

or go to www.dtos.org and donate through pay pal. Remember, your donation is tax deductible.

Thank you as always.
Connie Masserant
734-652-6004

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!

UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE REDFORD THEATRE

June 10 & 11—Bedknobs and Broomsticks

June 24 & 25—The Bridge on the River Kwai

July 8 & 9—Funny Girl

July 22 & 23—Star Trek II—The Wrath of Kahn (in 70mm)

August 5 & 6—Somewhere in Time

August 19 & 20—Sabrina

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.

Organ overtures start thirty minutes prior to each show time.
Sit back and enjoy the movies under the Redford's star-lit sky!

FROM THE BENCH

Scott Smith

The Ones That Got Away

Over the past fifty years, the Detroit Theatre Organ Club (now Society) has hosted 183 organists in 660 concerts. It's mind boggling. Almost without exception, every one of the famous theatre organists of that time period graced the bench of our Mighty Wurlitzer. It has been a musical smorgasbord that coincidentally helped establish many budding careers and establish the Senate Theatre as the unlikely concert hall of the theatre organ, decades after the intended usefulness of both had run out. Still, there were those organists who almost, but didn't quite make it, usually parted by death. It's disappointing, because the ones I'm thinking of could have provided a level of excitement equal to the greatest of those who actually did appear. Here are some names I've thought about over time, with perhaps a little speculation in each case as to the type of concert and reception they'd have had while in Detroit.

Jesse Crawford, Poet of the Organ. Crawford's recording career as an organist spanned some forty years, something achieved by only a small handful of other organists. Anyone who has played the theatre organ since that time owes at least some credit to his influence, directly or indirectly. His first professional gig of any magnitude

was at the Chicago Theatre in 1922, moving on to the famous New York Paramount in 1926. He left the Times Square landmark in 1933 in a salary dispute, and toured the country with personal appearances in order to make ends meet. One of those appearances was at the Fisher Theatre. While there, Don Miller allegedly paid Crawford fifty dollars to teach him how he performed his famous portamento. Using the Consumer Price Index, that would be about \$800.00 in 2011 dollars! Crawford later recorded at the New York Paramount Studio, but never returned to the bench of the auditorium organ; an unfortunate circumstance. In time, he moved on to Los Angeles where he taught at the Hammond studio, and recorded at the Lorin Whitney Studio as well as the so-called Bijou Theatre in the Toluca Lake home of Richard Simonton. Crawford had recorded two albums at the Bijou, and was working on a third when he died suddenly at age sixty-six on May 28, 1962, only weeks before appearing at a convention of the American Theatre Organ Enthusiasts (now the American Theatre Organ Society) in Los Angeles. He had agreed to come out of retirement to perform one more time for this understandably excited group at Simonton's home. Had he lived, perhaps his arm could have been gently twisted yet one more time to play for us. While his concert may not have been the most exciting we ever attended, I can guarantee you that the organist who achieved rock star status in the 1920s would have held everyone present in rapt attention with standing room only in the 1960s.

Buddy Cole produced some of the most musically magical recordings of his era, including piano, jazz Hammond, orchestra and theatre organ. Every famous vocalist in the business wanted Cole as their accompanist and wanted Cole's tasty and colorful arrangements, and he worked day and night to please them all. Veteran organist Gaylord Carter insisted Cole worked himself to death. He had already suffered two heart attacks, and the two solo albums made on his 3/27 Wurlitzer-Morton in his home studio in North Hollywood, Califor-



nia were his therapy. Those albums are still considered to be of iconic status. The two organ-orchestra albums



that followed were available in the cut-out bins of department stores for many years after his passing. We do know that he was contacted to come play for DTOS, but his death at age forty-seven on November 5, 1964 precluded that possibility. What a shame. The Fisher Wurlitzer, as set up in the Senate Theatre would have been an ideal location for Cole to perform. Anyone who has heard "Modern Pipe Organ" or "Autumn Nocturne" can vouch for that. However, Cole was primarily a studio musician, accustomed to doing take after take after take of the same phrase until he got it right, and then splice it all together. He was not known for concertizing extensively, but did show up for occasional open console sessions at Simonton's Bijou Theatre, and performed on his studio Wurlitzer-Morton for attendees of the 1962 ATOE convention. Had a Buddy Cole concert at the Senate Theatre actually happened, I can only imagine it would have been one of the most bootlegged concert tapes ever.

Raymond Shelley was a native and lifelong resident of Wichita, Kansas. He performed for church services, weddings, funerals, radio broadcasts, cocktail lounges and live concerts. He was even putting together a studio instrument in his home in hopes of a recording career. His appearance at the Fox Wurlitzer during the 1960 American Guild of Organists convention in Detroit got the attention of organist E. Power Biggs, of all people. Oddly, something about the creative freedom of Shelley's jazzy stylings stimulated the mind of the rather dry, literal classical recitalist, and that led to a contract

with Columbia Records. Shelley shot to fame overnight with his iconic recording of the Detroit Fox Wurlitzer, but unfortunately died in 1965 of heart problems. We're told that he was popping heart pills like candy during his Fox recording sessions, and it was obvious to those present it was probably only a matter of time. Oh, to hear his syncopated version of "I Got Rhythm" on the Fisher Wurlitzer just once would have been worth the price of admission.

Among the many reasons why the Detroit Theatre Organ Society rose to such a high level of respect so quickly, in my opinion, is that even early on, the club recognized and hired qualified organists who performed vastly contrasting styles. In terms of programming freedom and the taking of risks, it boldly paved the way for other clubs to follow. There was an almost unspoken policy of one-third established artists, one-third up-and-coming artists, and one-third local artists. What amounted to a basic corporate philosophy worked. As time wore on and older artists retired or passed on, the up-and-coming artists became established artists, and occasionally, local artists either rose in fame or mysteriously disappeared as younger artists rose to replace them. The contrast from month to month made it more interesting and more compelling to attend each and every program. You might have someone whose playing was big and solid like Don Baker, followed by the orchestral stylings of John Seng, followed by the rhythmically complex Ann Leaf, followed by that new kid from the pizza restaurant out in California...what was his name...Tom Hazel-something-or-other. Everyone who played the theatre organ professionally was very anxious to play for "The Club." Most were somehow snagged by the club very quickly after achieving a certain level of fame, and rarely did any of them disappoint. As a famous organist once said, "Just because you've played for DTOC doesn't mean you've 'made it,' but you haven't 'made it' until you've played for DTOC."

Today, the scene is different, and it disturbs and disappoints me. Thankfully, the club still maintains a steadfast policy of hiring qualified organists whose styles are not all copycats, but in so many other venues, particularly at organ conventions, I hear so much sameness. Fearing rejection and seeking instant fame, I suppose, younger artists adopt the styles of those who have come before them in an effort to gain quick ac-

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

ceptance, but in doing so, fail to explore their own creativity and establish their own unique identity. Of course, we all tend to copy those whom we admire to some degree, especially in our youth, and even established performers will play an admired or influential arrangement by another artist from time to time. I once heard jazz pianist George Shearing perform a Fats Waller arrangement in a live concert, and it was fantastic! I'm certain even Waller would have approved. Done well, it can potentially enhance a program. So often though, I hear arrangements played that are note-for-note copies of other organists, and worst of all, no credit of any sort is given. It's really a type of dishonesty; a form of theft, if you will. Once we fail to express ourselves creatively in what could be considered the ultimate creative medium utilizing a keyboard, we have failed our audience and worst of all, failed ourselves. There's no cure for this, other than being comfortable in our own skin, and not fearing the unknown. Granted, there is a certain amount of risk-taking that needs to be employed, but as the old saying goes: there is no gain

without risk. I suppose one has to be "of a certain age" before one realizes that while it's an important element, there's more to any performance art than just pleasing the audience. Some may view the theatre organ strictly as an entertainment machine, but just as importantly, it is also a vehicle of creative self-expression. When we play, it's like a window into our imagination. Do we have one? What else can you see? Or hear? Or feel?

In any case, the three aforementioned gentlemen represent what I consider to be some of the best of the best that we almost, but didn't quite get to hear. At least not at the Senate. I can tell you that they represented some of the most creative and original talent to ever touch a theatre organ. As we continue on this path and keep our ears to the ground, who knows what and who else is coming? So long as we retain our high standards and stay out of the creative way of the organists, we will always be the Concert Hall of the Theatre Organ. Always.

L E T T E R S T O T H E E D I T O R

Tony O'Brien
Member, Detroit Theater Organ Society

A special word of appreciation to our Newsletter Editor, Dave Calendine, for the superb job he has done and continues to do, in publishing the best newsletters DTOS has ever had! Dave, they have great eye appeal and are First-Class in every way! Everyone should know that it takes time and effort to put this together each month. THANKS DAVE!

From: Tony O'Brien

Another special word of appreciation goes out to Scott Smith for his superb series of articles: "From the Bench- Unraveling a Mayan Mystery." If anyone has not yet read this series, please do so! You'll be glad you did, and you'll learn a great deal along the way. Scott is a wealth of knowledge and, as we have seen from his Award-Winning work in the ATOS Journal, his easy-to-read style is both fun & informative! Thanks Scott, for taking the time to share this history of our one-of-a-kind Wurlitzer with all of us.

From: Tony O'Brien

NEW COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

Dave Calendine
DTOS Board of Directors

At the May 31, 2011 Board meeting, the new committee assignments for the next year were assigned.

The various committees are listed here so that you know who is serving in what capacity on the board.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Dick Leichtamer, President
Gil Francis, Vice-President
Dave Calendine, Secretary
Robert Weil, Treasurer
Glenn Rank, Assistant Treasurer

BUILDING SECURITY

Dick Leichtamer, Chairman
All Board Members

POLICY & PROCEDURES

Gil Francis, Chairman
Gary Grzebiecik

BY-LAWS

Gil Francis, Chairman
Gary Grzebiecik

FINANCE—WAYS & MEANS

George Orbits, Chairman
Dick Leichtamer, ex officio
Bob Weil, Treasurer
Glenn Rank, Assistant Treasurer
Connie Masserant
Michael Fisher

PUBLICITY COMMITTEE

Gary Grzebiecik, Chairman
Paul Jacyk
Gil Francis
Lance Luce

LIGHTING COMMITTEE

T.J. Casterson, Chairman

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Lance Luce, Chairman
Connie Masserant
Dave Calendine
Fr. Andrew Rogers

BUILDING MANAGER COMMITTEE

Connie Masserant, Manager
Dave Calendine, Assistant Manager
Bob Weil, Assistant
Dick Leichtamer, ex officio
Michael Fisher, Assistant

RECORDING COMMITTEE

Fred Brufloft, Chairman
Jeff Cushing

ORGAN MAINTENANCE COMMITTEE

Scott Smith, Chairman
Dave Voydanoff
Steven Warner
George Orbits
Steve Schlesing
Jeff Slabaugh
John Lauter

MEMBERS CONCERT

Lance Luce, Chairman

PLAYING RESERVATIONS

Gary Grzebiecik, Chairman
Paul Jacyk, Assistant Chairman

NEWSLETTER

Dave Calendine, Editor

TICKETS, PRINTING, ADMISSIONS

Dave Calendine, Chairman
Norm Horning
Michael Fisher?

NEW COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS... *continued*

PROGRAM PLANNING, ARTIST SELECTION

Dick Leichtamer, Chairman
Jeff Cushing
Dave Calendine
Don Jenks
Gil Francis
John Lauter

ARTISTS TRAVEL, HOTEL, PRACTICE TIME

Dick Leichtamer, Chairman
Dave Calendine
Gil Francis
Bob Weil
Gary Grzebiecik

RENTALS & EVENTS

Michael Fisher, Chairman
Fred Brufloft
Bob Weil

RENOVATIONS, THEATER DECORATING

Connie Masserant, Chairman
Michael Fisher
Dick Leichtamer, ex officio
George Orbits

CONCERT STAFF

Dick Leichtamer, Program MC
Fred Brufloft, Recording
Dave Calendine, Tickets
Norm Horning, Admissions
Michael Fisher, Admissions
Sherry Leichtamer, Green Room
Bob Weil, Merchandise Counter
T.J. Casterson, Lights
Lance Luce, Membership Table
REFRESHMENT COUNTER
Carl Kiehler, Chairman
Sherry Leichtamer, Assistant Chairman
Dick Leichtamer, ex officio
Christiane Teska
Tom Iwankovitsch
Dawn O'Vares



Board members at Jelani's concert from left to right:

Lance Luce
Gary Grzebiecik
Michael Fisher
Connie Masserant
Jeff Cushing
Bob Weil
Gil Francis
George Orbits

Not pictured:
Fred Brufloft
Dave Calendine
Tom Iwankovitsch
Dick Leichtamer
Fr. Andrew Rogers

MEET IN THE MIDDLE!

Grand Ledge Opera House, Lansing MI
Sunday, August 7, 2011 1:30 p.m.

Members of the Detroit Theater Organ Society have been invited to be a part of a special event in Lansing called "Meet In The Middle!" The theatre-organ-centered event will take place Sunday, August 7, 2011. at the Grand Ledge Opera House and is hosted by the Lansing Theatre Organ Society.

Organ clubs from all areas of the state have been invited to join in on the fun. The event starts with lunch at 1:30 p.m. After that, a concert on the Grand Ledge Opera House's Barton Theatre Pipe Organ will be performed by Fort Wayne artist Cletus Goens.

The Grand Ledge Opera House is located at 121 S. Bridge St. (M-100) @ River St., Grand Ledge (just West of Lansing), Michigan

Cost per person is only \$25 for the buffet lunch and entertainment, and you are asked to pre-pay and reserve by July 17

All theatre organ clubs, committees and museums within a two-hour drive of Lansing are invited to attend this now-annual event! See old friends, meet new ones! Have a meal, hear a mini-concert and enjoy open console at the 3-manual, 20-rank Barton organ!

Send checks or money orders to:
Lansing Theatre Organ, Inc.
P. O. Box 26154
Lansing, MI 48909

Questions?
Email: LTOPOPS@AOL.COM
Call the LTO Office: 517-394-9881



This year's artist: Cletus Goens



photo: Lances Luce

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Concert Hotline: (313) 894-4100

Website: www.dtos.org
Look for us on Facebook!

2011 Concert Series

SENATE THEATER

June 12—John Lauter
July (TBA) - Open Console
September 11—Members Concert
October 9—David Wickerham
November 20—Tony O'Brien
December 11—Dave Calendine