

# *Semicentennial Edition* **PIPES of PATOS.**

VOL. L, No. 1 - SUMMER 2020

---

## **SPECIAL NOTICE**

*By Jay Smith*

This issue of the *Pipes of PATOS* is way overdue for a variety of reasons—not the least of which is the COVID-19 situation. It has caused us to greatly curtail and even cancel many of our operations. Some of the material presented herein was prepared and edited months ago but never issued. We've decided to take what had been prepared previously, add some new material, do some minimal editing to reflect current conditions, and go to press ASAP.

Also, to reduce costs and effort, it is being distributed by email to those members for whom we have email addresses on file and by postal mail to all others. If you are reading this on email, please help us keep our files current by replying to that email with "**GOT IT**". If we don't receive your "**GOT IT**" reply, we will call to verify your address.

## **EGAD!!! WHAT A YEAR**

*By Dale Abraham, President*

Well, this calendar year will certainly end up being the strangest one ever for PATOS. And there are still five months to go!

A cancelled anniversary program, limited access to the organ, no ability to book future concerts...any list of disappointments in 2020 would be ridiculously long.

Nevertheless, though we are in the same dormant state as every other arts-presenting organization in town, we are in much better shape to weather the storm than many non-profits. We are in position to be successful upon the resumption of our mission.

Many Pittsburgh non-profits rely heavily on ticket or admission revenues, thus their finances are in dire straits these days. Not so for PATOS. Since about 2014, we have placed emphasis on charitable contributions, rather than ticket sales, to sustain the organization. That turned out to be the right strategy. Our treasury remains quite healthy, as you will see in the attached Treasurer's Report.

I don't foresee us getting back to our normal schedule of events until at least Spring 2021. The near future is much too uncertain to book organists at this time. There is no way to predict how this pandemic will play out, and until we can guarantee the safety of our patrons we'll just have to reluctantly sit on the sidelines for a while.

You may have seen or heard about virtual music presentations being offered via Zoom, mostly for free but sometimes for a small admission fee. We have discussed that possibility for PATOS, but concluded that it's not a realistic option for presenting our Wurlitzer to the public.

I do not believe that listening to a theatre organ on a tablet or a phone would be a satisfying experience. Theatre organ is something that must be experienced live for

best effect, and an inferior version just doesn't cut it. Maybe Zoom works for chamber music or piano solos, but I doubt its value for theatre organ.

That said, we do have a virtual event on the horizon. We were approached by Chad Hunter, former PATOS board member and now the executive director of the Carnegie Science Center's Omnimax Theater, about using our organ for a silent film presentation in October. The audience in the Omnimax Theater would watch Jay Spencer accompany the 1921 silent "Nosferatu" on the K.O. Wurlitzer.

Our role in this venture would be to furnish the organ for the performance in exchange for appropriate publicity for PATOS by the Science Center. There would be no audience at Keystone Oaks for the event. The Science Center would assume all expenses of the production, including the artist fee.

So, all is not lost!

In conclusion, I thank you for your stalwart support. There is no question that we will return with a vigorous calendar of events, but it's simply impossible to know when that will be.

Your understanding and patience is most appreciated. Please contact me at [info@pittsburghtheatreorgan.com](mailto:info@pittsburghtheatreorgan.com) if you would like to discuss anything related to PATOS.

## **PATOS FINANCIAL REPORT**

*By Bob Powischill, Treasurer*

For fiscal year 7/1/2019 to 6/30/2020:

- Income - \$12,155.36 (including \$912.00 from dues and \$8,341.00 from donations)
- Expenses - \$7,890.14

Total funds as of 6/30/2020 - \$46,025.66

- \$10,302.38 in the checking account
- \$35,723.28 in the savings account

The above is an abbreviated version of the full report, which is available to members upon request. If you wish to acquire a copy of the full report, contact Bob by phone at 412-881-5643 or by email at [patmrjp@hotmail.com](mailto:patmrjp@hotmail.com).

## **A PATOS SPECIAL CELEBRATION**

*By Jay Smith*

This year is a very special year for PATOS. As you may already know, The Pittsburgh Area Theatre Organ Society came into existence and was incorporated in 1970 as evidenced by our corporate seal.

To commemorate the fact that we have been in existence for half a century, we had planned to celebrate the occasion on April 25, 2020, with

a gala event featuring the renowned Dave Wickerham in a formal concert on the 3/19 PATOS Wurlitzer that was to be preceded by a

catered dinner in the school's cafeteria. The dinner, in turn, was to have been preceded by pre-dinner entertainment in the auditorium including showing of *The Balloonatic*, a 1923 silent short starring Buster Keaton, with accompaniment provided by our President, Dale Abraham. Also to be included were a few piano solos by Rowan Belt, who played for us at our event last September. Details of this event were being worked out and planning was well underway when COVID-19 reared its head and the program had to be cancelled. It is currently anticipated that when things get back to normal, we will resurrect the plans and put it back on the schedule. Stay tuned!

As a final note on the subject, the cancelled date (April 25, 2020) of this event would have been well-timed. Our records



show that the very first PATOS board meeting was on April 20, 1970, five days earlier in the year than our anniversary event.

### **IT'S ELECTION YEAR—ALMOST**

*By Jay Smith*

Well, folks, 2020 is an even-numbered year - which means that PATOS would normally have an election to choose members to serve on its Board of Directors. PATOS Directors are elected to four-year terms and every two years, the terms of about half of the Board expire. To make the election as meaningful as possible, we were trying to start early this year to assemble a slate of nominee's names to be on the ballots which were scheduled to be mailed out in May or June.

None of this happened. So we revised our By-Laws to move forward by maintaining the status quo in the Board by effectively delaying the 2020 election by one year. So, once again, stay tuned.

### **TO MIDI OR NOT TO MIDI**

*By Jay Smith*

I am looking for input from our members about whether or not we should fully implement MIDI into the PATOS Wurlitzer. MIDI stands for Musical Instrument Digital Interface. It is a standardized means for adding digital voices to an instrument. This can be a controversial subject for several reasons. Some people insist that a pipe organ should only possess sounds produced from wind-blown pipes. Others claim that adding musical sounds beyond the wind-blown pipe sound can only add to its capabilities.

Some years ago, we partially implemented MIDI as a means to add a piano sound to our Wurlitzer. The piano you hear at Keystone Oaks is created

electronically and keyed via MIDI. What is being considered here is whether or not to fully implement the vast capabilities of MIDI to all three manuals and pedals of your Wurlitzer. If you have any strong feelings on the matter (either pro or con), please let us know.

### **AN AWARD**

*By Jay Smith*

Last year, I received a huge surprise in the mail in the form of a very nice award from the national American Theatre Organ Society (ATOS). PATOS is not directly affiliated with ATOS, although several of our members are also ATOS members. I, for example, am not an ATOS member although I was in the past for several years. Therefore, I was greatly surprised to receive the award.

Although I felt honored to be named as the recipient of the award, it really belongs to the members of PATOS—both past and present. Therefore, I thought it might be appropriate to use Photoshop to revise a scan of the award to better represent those responsible for the feat. I don't think those at ATOS would object. Many PATOS members were involved in various ways to make it happen.





## HISTORY OF THE PATOS

### WURLITZER

*By Jay Smith*

We thought it would be appropriate in this first issue of our second half-century to relate some of the history of the PATOS Wurlitzer.

The organ started as Opus 1497 as a Wurlitzer Style H organ. As such, it had two manuals and 10 ranks of pipes. It was shipped from the North Tonawanda, NY, factory on October 30, 1926, and was installed in the Prospect Theatre in Brooklyn, NY, over the following weeks. An interesting sidelight is that the Prospect Theatre in Brooklyn is the place where the Three Stooges first performed on stage.



The organ was installed in two chambers as a Style H-NP with the NP designation indicating that the pressure-activated piano that was normally a part of the Style H was eliminated. In place of the piano, a second Vox Humana was installed and was available only on the solo manual at the three pitches, 16', 8' and 4', normally used for the piano. The organ therefore had eleven ranks installed in two chambers and

with the second Vox Humana installed (most likely) in the rear of the theatre. Some unknown time later (reportedly around 1960), the organ was removed and installed in Hempstead High School in Hempstead, Long Island, NY where it resided for some period of time. From there, it was moved into storage somewhere and became under the ownership of Walter Kehoe who lived in Upper Montclair, New Jersey. It remained in storage until located by PATOS and purchased in 1974. Some unknown time prior to that date, the second Vox Humana had been lost somehow. So, the organ was at that time a two manual instrument with the following ten ranks: Harmonic Tuba, Diaphonic Diapason, Tibia Clausa, Clarinet, Kinura, Orchestral Oboe, Viol, Viol Celeste, Flute, and Vox Humana. Also, the following tuned percussions were included: Chimes, Sleigh Bells, Xylophone, Glockenspiel, Orchestra Bells, and Chrysoglott.

After its purchase by PATOS, the organ was moved from its storage site via volunteered labor to Pittsburgh and placed under the stands of the Keystone Oaks High School football stadium. Arrangements had been made between PATOS and the newly formed Keystone Oaks School District to use that location for the purpose of performing a complete disassembly and restoration effort in preparation for installation in the recently built High School auditorium about a mile away. The final agreement between PATOS and the Keystone Oaks School District was signed by both parties on July 8, 1974.

After a complete restoration (during 2-3 sessions per week in the stadium from 1974 to 1978), the organ was installed in two chambers in 1977-78. The first public performance on the organ in its new venue was on February 18, 1978 when Don Baker (of New York Paramount fame) played the dedication concert to a nearly sold-out crowd.

The details of how Opus 1497 grew from 2 manuals with 10 ranks on its

dedication to its present size of 3 manuals with 19 ranks will be provided in the next issue of the *Pipes of PATOS*.

## **ASSETS OF VALUE TO THE THEATRE** **ORGANIST**

*By Wade Hamilton*

*Foreword by Rowan Belt*

This article is a further installment in our series of articles republished from *The Metronome* magazine. This particular article, like the last one we included, was written by Wade Hamilton, organist at the Ritz Theatre in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and was originally published on April 1, 1927. It would be of particular value to any of our members who are continuing in the present day the art of silent film accompaniment, but should also be of interest to anyone who enjoys getting a contemporary perspective on what makes a “quality” theatre organist. Many thanks, as always, to Dale Abraham for providing our editorial staff with these exceptional and interesting articles.

\*\*

THERE are three faculties of utmost importance to the theatre organist, namely – a keen sense of humor; the ability to sight read easily; and the ability to memorize. Of these three, perhaps one of the most noticeable to the audience is the well-developed sense of humor. If you have ever listened to C Sharpe Minor play an animated cartoon, to Jesse Crawford play in his unimitatable style such pictures as *Aesop's Fables*, or to Henry B. Murtagh in his humorous interpretation of various short subjects, you must realize that humor is a great asset to the theatre organist. Personally, I have heard organists that lacked this sense and it seems that the absence of humor takes out of their work something that is essential

to real music. Even though Mr. Minor, Mr. Crawford, and Mr. Murtagh are able to make their respective audiences howl with laughter, it is not because they are by nature comical. It is because they have all realized that there are two ways to “get at” an audience—either make them laugh or make them weep. Of the two ways, of course, the most pleasant is to make them laugh, and there are a multitude of opportunities in playing pictures to provoke a laugh by clever manipulation of an organ.

Some years ago, at Grauman's Million Dollar Theatre in Los Angeles, a two-reel picture was run illustrating “How to Eat and Grow Thin”. This picture in itself was not amusing, at least there was no opportunity for one to burst out in violent laughter. But, thanks to the resourcefulness of Mr. Murtagh, the organist there at the time, the house was kept laughing during the entire two reels. I doubt if this picture would have made any impression on the public at all had not Mr. Murtagh greatly increased what little of humor there was in the picture. He recognized the opportunities for humor and made the most of every one, and because of that everyone in the audience will remember that picture for years to come and they will also remember an organist who has developed his sense of humor to a high degree.

This may give you an insight into the great asset you will develop when you can put into your music the right amount of humor at the right time. Of course, at first there will be the tendency to overdo the humorous at the expense of everything else and this is something you will have to overcome. Injudicious humor or perverted humor can very quickly give you a black eye, because the audience of today is a wide awake one—they are ever trying to find something to criticize and they do usually find something that is not to their liking. However, you cannot please everyone and the best you can do is to see the humor in

everything that is supposed to be funny and bring that humor out, magnify it, make it very prominent. Then when the seriousness of the situation makes it apparent that humor would only be satire, forget your humorous tendencies and render that sort of music that expresses serious moods and emotions.

THE ability to know when humor can be used to the best advantage is acquired through your knowledge of the humorous side of the public and your application of common sense to the situation. It is said that you cannot “kid” the public, and when it comes to theatre music no axiom holds more truth than this one. You must learn to differentiate humor from all other varieties of emotion and then make the very most you can out of every bit of it.

Pardon me if I go back a few years for my next illustration. I do it because it comes to mind as a perfect example of what this all amounts to. In the *Toonerville Trolley* series of comedies, one of them opens up with a meeting of the trustees of the Toonerville church. The conductor of the famous streetcar is the chairman and he opens his address with “Brethren, we have gathered here this evening, etc., etc.” By the looks of the old man you could easily suppose that he has a very deep, gruff voice and that perhaps he draws his words out in a deep monotonous tone. All right, let us see what we can do to imitate that voice. Supposing there is a Vox Humana stop at our command (almost any organ has such a set of pipes), then we will play on the lower octave of the Vox in imitation of the old man delivering his speech, trying to follow his words as nearly as possible. Now there is another old fellow at the meeting that suggests a very high tenor voice. His looks suggest a voice that is rather cracked. He does not speak for some time, but when he does, he says, “I’m with you, brethren.” How can we here give an imitation that is different from the

previous one yet savors of the same spirit? Very easily done, we shall use the upper register of the Vox Humana in imitation of his supposedly squeaky voice. This all sounds very simple, does it not? And the funny part of it all is – that it is simple. Then the question arises, “How am I to get such ideas as this?” The answer is – use your own original resourcefulness, couple it with your own humor and use the resulting combination freely, for it is your originality that is going to count in the end.

It might be interesting for you to know that the writer played the comedy referred to and tested this theory concerning the use of humor by first utterly disregarding any such limitations, just to see how heartily the audience would laugh at the picture alone. Then at another performance I imitated these speeches just as described above. The conclusion was that the picture was not so funny after all, but it could be made very funny, in fact, so funny that the audience fairly went hysterical with laughter. It is such humor as this that the public will be quick to notice, so we therefore cannot say too much or study too long in trying to make our humor take with and satisfy the humor of the public.

THE ability to read music is a necessary asset if you are to make the most of your work. You should be learning new music continually and never let a day go by without having learned at least one new selection. There are so many, many musical works that one cannot hope to learn them all in a lifetime, but by learning at least one new thing a day you will step far ahead of the ordinary player who is content to “let the morrow take care of itself.” Sometimes this failure to learn is due to laziness. Sometimes it is due to a self-satisfied attitude, but very often it is due to the inability to read readily. In training yourself to read, make it your business to play everything you read with as perfect accuracy as is possible. Many seem to

have the habit of rather sliding over a lot of notes, picking out here and there notes that they think are the most important, and such practice tends to hinder rather than help you to read. If you can read fairly simple things readily then tackle some of the heavier works such as Liszt's Transcriptions and see what you can do with them. The first result will be disheartening, but then you are training yourself to read, and even if your first attempts do not satisfy you still you are accomplishing something. The things that are the hardest to learn will stay with you the longest and you will be surer of them for having worked so hard with them. There are many harder things to read than the Transcriptions and as you advance in the profession you have chosen you will find that preliminary training in reading has helped you greatly. In adapting such works as these for the organ you are at once confronted with greater problems than reading, and you should not have to grope around to find the correct notes when you should be thinking and doing other things just as important as the correct notes are. Familiarize yourself with the accompaniments of such songs as John McCormack, Caruso, and other artists have made famous. A great many of such songs will tax your reading ability, but you will be killing two birds with one stone, for you are training yourself to read and at the same time are becoming familiar with music that you can use to good advantage. Study the standard overtures with the idea if reading them right off—you can easily procure the piano parts to these, and while developing your reading you will be learning many passages that you can use in the future. In fact, read anything that is hard enough to make you buckle down to work.

IN sight reading, always look first at the signature and at the time the selection is written in. Then see what tempo is called for. With these things in mind look at the first

notes, always reading from the bottom note up to the top note—never from the top to the bottom, as the bass notes oft times give you a good cue concerning what you may expect in the upper notes. Do not try to play things in strict tempo at first, but go slowly and give your hands ample time and chance to do exactly what your brain tells them to do. As your execution becomes more facile, then play the selection up to the correct tempo, but do not do it at the expense of accuracy. It is accuracy that one should particularly strive for in organ playing so be sure that your mind sees the notes as they are written and that your hands do exactly as they are commanded to do. When you have established a perfect working line from the printed page through the eyes to the mind and thence to the fingers, and they function properly, then you need not worry about playing anything that may be put in front of you. To acquire this faculty requires work and plenty of it, but not alone work—your mind must be concentrated on what you are doing, and practice makes perfect.

We find a great many movie theatres running an act or two of vaudeville in connection with the picture and the organist is very apt to find himself confronted with a sheet of paper that looks as though a chicken had upset a bottle of ink on it and had then done a dance to show how much he cared. These manuscripts are very hard to read and the player who has not trained himself to read at sight will be lost, therefore you can spend a lot of time and thought to reading and save yourself a great amount of grief in the future.

Possession of a good musical memory is a wonderful help to you, and while it is not a necessary faculty, I feel that serious thought should be given to the development of your memory. It is a fallacy for anyone to state that they cannot remember a certain piece of music. Many persons who are capable of playing beautifully seem to think that they cannot

play from memory what they can play with their music in front of them. Such reasoning is false, because anyone who can play the piano and can hum a tune, can learn to memorize anything they wish if they will train themselves to do so. The main trouble seems to lie in the mind, that unruly part of our makeup, that can be made to do wonderful things or can make us do whatever seems the easiest. There have been books written on the power of will, the art of remembering, and many other like subjects, but the whole substance of them all is the training of the mind. When you were very young your parents who taught you to speak were merely encouraging the use of your mind. Later on, during your school days you were taught to read, to write, to understand mathematics—and in all of these things your teachers did no much more than to stimulate your mind, to make your mind do what it was told to do. That is the secret of the development of memory. Of course, as you grow older, your mind is less susceptible to stimulation, and consequently your will power is called upon to work a little harder than it did when you were younger. More concentration is needed, more attention should be paid to whatever you are trying to do—it is your mind you must train and the sooner you realize this fact the sooner you will be able to accomplish things. No man ever arose to prominence and stayed there through pure luck—somewhere along the line he put his whole body, heart, and soul into what he was doing, and he had to train his mind to stay on that one thing until he accomplished his goal.

ALL of this then we can apply to our particular need. We need to have a good memory and we need to memorize quickly because it will be of untold benefit to us as we sit at the organ bench interpreting drama, comedy, or what not. Your eye must be on the screen a large part of the time, for how do you know what is going on if you do not

watch the screen? Your mind must perforce be on many things at once—your hands, your feet, the capabilities of your instrument, the screen, and it must be on what to play and how and when to play it. In other words, you have a lot to do besides looking at a printed copy of music before you—how much more free you are if you can rely on your memory to supply the notes while your mind is occupied in choosing the music and registering it. I once heard an organist play a solo, spotlight on him and everything, but right in the middle of it something happened to his music, it slid from the music rack and scattered in half a dozen directions. Of course, he had to stop, pick up the music, arrange it properly, find his place, and then proceed. The effect of all this was rather comical and a low ripple of snickers prevailed over the house. Now if he had learned to memorize that particular piece he would have been saved a lot of embarrassment and his solo would have “clicked”. As it was the thing fell flat, even though the audience felt sorry for the fellow. These things all go to show that you can better yourself by seeing to it that you do memorize as many things as you possibly can.

TO memorize quickly, you should first mentally “diagnose the patient,” that is, study the piece from the standpoint of melody (every piece of music is composed of a series of melodies); then study it from a harmonic standpoint, notice the chord progressions and degressions, make it your business to remember anything unusual about the particular piece, and do not rest until you have thoroughly mastered every part of it. At first try some simple selection such as Rubinstein’s *Melody in F*, then try some popular tune analyzing it from both melodic and harmonic standpoints looking out for unusual things that will serve as a guidepost for your memory. You will be surprised how quickly you can memorize a popular tune for they all follow more or less



a stereotyped form of chord progression, and if they do not follow this form they usually are not so foreign in construction that they are easy to remember on that account. 'Tis well that they are easy to memorize as they are popular today and passé tomorrow. Therefore, your greatest efforts should be in the memorizing of that music which will be of greatest value to you. Soft, melodious selections, elegiac pieces, Chopin, MacDowell, Homer Grunn, Grieg, Cadman, semi-classical songs of all kinds, song cycles such as *Indian Love Lyrics* by Amy Woodforde-Finden, violin numbers such as *Souvenir* by Drdla or *Liebesfreud* by Kreisler – all of these things you will find use for together with many other selections of the same caliber.

So, you must set your mind to it, keeping in mind that you *can* memorize if you go about it systematically. Analyze the selection as to melody and harmony, notice the general construction of the piece, how one part is related to the preceding and following parts – and don't neglect to play it over and over and over until the whole thing is indelibly stamped on your mind. Concentration on these things will make your mind do what you tell it to do, and you will play with a great amount of satisfaction to yourself, for your music will be that of one inspired to play just the sort of music called for by the screen, and not merely the skeleton of music that is portrayed on the printed page.

### **NEW BOARD MEMBER WELCOMED**

*By Dale Abraham*

Please welcome the newest member of the PATOS Board of Directors, Jim Lewellyn, who was appointed in the Fall of 2019. Jim will serve out the term of Chad Hunter, who resigned last summer.

Jim brings to the board an enthusiasm to serve PATOS, plus valuable

musical and business insight. Jim has always had a keen interest in organ, and started out many years ago as a working musician playing the accordion. Later on, he successfully operated his own businesses.

In addition, Jim is a talented artist who specializes in stained glass and beveled etched glass. His recently created glass sculpture depicting a church was to have been raffled off at the PATOS 50th Anniversary gala event on April 25<sup>th</sup>.

Jim has already been an asset to the Board in just the couple of months into his tenure. Please join me in welcoming Jim to the PATOS Board.

### **PASSING OF A FRIEND**

*by Jay Smith*

It was sad to learn that Harry Ebert passed away several months ago. Harry was the owner of the Ebert Organ Company and was of major assistance to PATOS through the years contributing his expertise concerning organ installation and maintenance. We miss his physical presence although the results of his lifetime labors will remain with people in the Pittsburgh area through the many pipe organs he built and maintained.



## **PIPES of PATOS**

A Journal of the Pittsburgh Area Theatre Organ Society

### **Editor**

Rowan Belt

### **Masthead**

Joe Verri

Many thanks go out to our contributing writers!

Comments, questions, article submissions?

### CONTACT:

Rowan Belt, Editor

752 Marvle Valley Drive  
Bethel Park, PA 15102-1332  
Email: [PIPESofPATOS@gmail.com](mailto:PIPESofPATOS@gmail.com)

### WEBSITE:

[pittsburghtheatreorgan.com](http://pittsburghtheatreorgan.com)

### SPONSORS:

