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# The WINDSHEET



Newsletter of the NOR-CAL THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY  
 PO Box 27238, Oakland, California 94602-0438 510/644-2707

www.theatreorgans.com/norcal

October 2004

## Benicia's Majestic Theatre (Open House)

On Sunday, October 24, at 2 PM, Benicia's Majestic Theatre will be our gathering place for an Open House and brief demonstration of the Wurlitzer pipe organ that organist and club member Robert Reichert is installing there. Located at 710 First Street, across the street from the old State Capitol, the theatre was built in the 1920's as a performing arts house. Originally seating about 700, the seating plan has been modified, retaining about 300 of the original seats, while increasing the distance between rows. In addition, portable seating for an additional hundred persons can be arranged on a dance floor that fronts the now-redesigned thrust stage. Most of the other decor and furnishings retain the character of the original house design. The house is now an active performing arts venue.

Robert Reichert, theatre co-manager, organist, and the installer of the Majestic's Wurlitzer will meet us at 2 PM, give an introduction to the theatre and provide a demonstration of the organ. The organ console will be available for viewing, but there will be no organ chamber tours. Robert advised that this area was the part of the world where Dave Quinlan lived and  
*(Majestic Theatre continued on Page Three)*



## Jim Riggs opens 2004-2005 Nor-Cal Public Organ Concert Series



Sunday, November 7, at 2:30 PM  
 Berkeley Community Theatre  
 Kittredge and Milvia St., Berkeley

Nor-Cal presents its first public concert of the season on their Berkeley Community Theatre Wurlitzer. Jim Riggs, a long-time favorite of those in the Bay Area, will provide a happy and up-beat mix of tunes to cheer you.

For over 25 years, Jim Riggs has been the San Francisco Bay Area's most visible—and most listened to—purveyor of music on the "Mighty Wurlitzer" pipe organ. He has regularly appeared at every major Bay Area movie house equipped with a Theatre Organ, Riggs has entertained well over one million toe-tapping patrons.

Riggs is now in his 16<sup>th</sup> year as House Organist at the fabulous Paramount Theatre in Oakland, an internationally acclaimed Art-Deco masterpiece and National Historic Landmark. His music features Classic American Pop—the music produced between the wars. His programs highlight the great tunes of Gershwin, Porter, Berlin, Kern, Arlen, Warren and

many more. His musical styling often evokes images of dance orchestras and big swing bands.

Riggs has released several recordings with the latest—"Up Close & Personal"—coming out later in 2004. His music has been heard on National Public Radio in the USA and the BBC in the UK. Riggs was featured in the Public Broadcasting System's television documentary, "Pulling Out All The Stops—A History of the Pipe Organ in America".

The final word from Jim is: "The BCT organ is a rarity in the theatre organ world: thoughtfully designed, carefully installed and meticulously maintained. It always does exactly what you want it to and provides its organists with a complete tonal palette. Simply put, it's a top-drawer Wurlitzer and I'm delighted to be playing it once again. Besides, its got two of the coolest consoles ever built; who wouldn't

*(Jim Riggs continued on Page Three)*

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<b>CHAIRMAN</b> Donald G. Siefert 1129 Augusta Pointe Ct Ripon, CA 95366 209/599-7480 dsiefert@sbcglobal.net	<b>VICE CHAIRMAN</b> Kevin J. King 3106 Sheffield Ave. Oakland, CA 94602 510/532-9345 kevjking@juno.com	<b>SECRETARY</b> Arthur Woodworth 600 Coventry Road Kensington, CA 94707 510/524-7452 awoodworth@bigfoot.com	<b>TREASURER</b> John H. O'Neill P.O. Box 2741 Oakland, CA 94602 510/632-9177	<b>EDITOR</b> Robert K. Shipley 1734-9 W El Camino Real Mountain View, CA 94040 650/968-3290 bshipley1@atmc.net	<b>PROGRAM</b> Warren P. Lubich 2950 26th Avenue San Francisco, CA 94132 415/566-2623 lubie65@aol.com	<b>TICKETS/ MEMBERSHIP</b> John H. O'Neill P.O. Box 2741 Oakland, CA 94602 510/632-9177
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When emailing, include ATOS in the subject line. Otherwise, if you are unknown to the recipient's computer, its SPAM filter may divert your mail.

## Majestic Theatre (continued from Page One)

played, and that as a friend of Dave's he wants this organ to remember him to us all.

**Driving directions:** From I-680 or I-80 take the I-780 exit toward Benicia. From I-780, take the East 2<sup>nd</sup> St exit toward Central Benicia. Slight Left onto Viewmont then Left onto E 2<sup>nd</sup> St Turn right on Military East St. for one block (just before Civic Center Park) and then turn Left onto 1<sup>st</sup> Street. The Majestic Theatre is at 710. On-street parking should be fairly easy, and there are many other sightseeing opportunities, restaurants and small shops in the area.



**Jim Riggs** (continued from Page One) want to make beautiful music on it?" As you can see, Nor-Cal makes the artists happy—and they make us happy!

### Note to our regular concertgoers:

The Kittredge Street parking garage has been demolished. There will be parking for a fee on the Berkeley High School campus. The Entrances (two *separate* lots) are off Bancroft and Channing between MLKing Jr Way and Kittredge on the San Jose side of the Campus. These lots will be available for us to use to attend this concert. Plan on arriving a bit early to find this on-campus location or to find on-street parking. Still another option is to use the Alston St. parking garage. Or, park at a BART lot and take the BART train to the Berkeley stop and then walk the 2-1/2 blocks to the theatre.

## Future Nor-Cal Events

### Annual Membership Meeting

December 5, 2004 BCT, Concert 2:30 PM—Mark Herman performs, with the Annual Membership Business Meeting following. No meal is planned so no advance tickets are required.

### Public Concert Series at BCT

for 2004-2005—all start at 2:30 PM:  
February 6, 2005 — Dave Wickerham  
March 6, 2005 — Jonas Nordwall  
May 1, 2005 — Lew Williams

### Morton Madness

April 9, 2005 Harmony Wynelands, Lodi and Kautz Ironstone Vineyards, Murphys —Tom Hazleton

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## Thoughts from an Artist

### Solo Stringer's Zingers

(Dean Cook, who entertains on the Wurlitzer at Angelino's in San Jose, is a frequent contributor.)



One aspect of concertizing that is rarely considered by the concert-going public is the difficulty in adjusting to the ergonomics of individual consoles. As these instruments were all handmade, every organ console has its own physical dimensions. Wurlitzer's are definitely the most comfortable to sit at; so successful was the design, that it has become the paradigm of organ ergonomics. But they weren't the only manufacturers, and others had often, with different ideas about how a key desk should be set up.

To date, I've played 2, 3 and 4 manual consoles from Wurlitzer, Barton, Kimball, and Robert Morton. I've recently played a 3 Manual RM, so I'll talk about them, first.

First, the bench is too low; in fact I've yet to find a pipe organ bench that I didn't need risers for, but it's especially bad on Morton benches. I'm convinced that the height of the average 20's Theater Organist must have been around 5'3". 6-footers like me need a little more space.

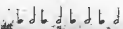
Second, the "key desk," the bed the keyboards rest in, is set further back on a Morton, making the stop-rails extend back almost behind the organist; The knee board is likewise set further back, making the performer reach further out to grab the Swell Pedals, a problem compounded by the placement of the Swell pedals to the left, making it necessary for the organist to cross their legs when playing any pedal higher than low "G." This also means the organist can find himself on the Crescendo Pedal rather than the Right Chamber Swell without realizing it. The Effects Toe Pistons are tiny, too far to the left and hard to reach accurately; much practice in leg crossing is needed to achieve the requisite dexterity to hit one-and only one-accurately. It's much easier when the bench is on risers.

The pedal tension-spring and contact design is very easy to access and adjust; which is good, as the design also breaks down constantly when not frequently maintained. A working knowledge of the use of the screwdriver and needle-nosed pliers is all that is needed to keep

a Morton pedal board at least playing. In order to play a concert, a performer must sometimes roll up his/ her sleeves, get on the knees, and twist those wire leads!

The manual keys themselves seem to be a little shorter than on a Wurlitzer; one can debate the deficiencies inherent in an "off-size" manual scaling, but it does make manual-bridging a little easier.

I love the sound of a Morton, though. Even the small ones seem to have "guts" to spare. My theory about the console design: It's only what one can expect when you try to startup a Theater Organ Company, and staff it with disgruntled ex-Wurlitzer employees.



### Chairman's Windpipe

(continued from Page Two)

made booking the auditorium and artists a lot more work than usual for Bill. We all owe him a round of applause for the extra effort he put in to get the job done. If these concerts are to be successful, we need attendance. To date our best source of attendees is friends and relatives of our members by way of word of mouth invitation.

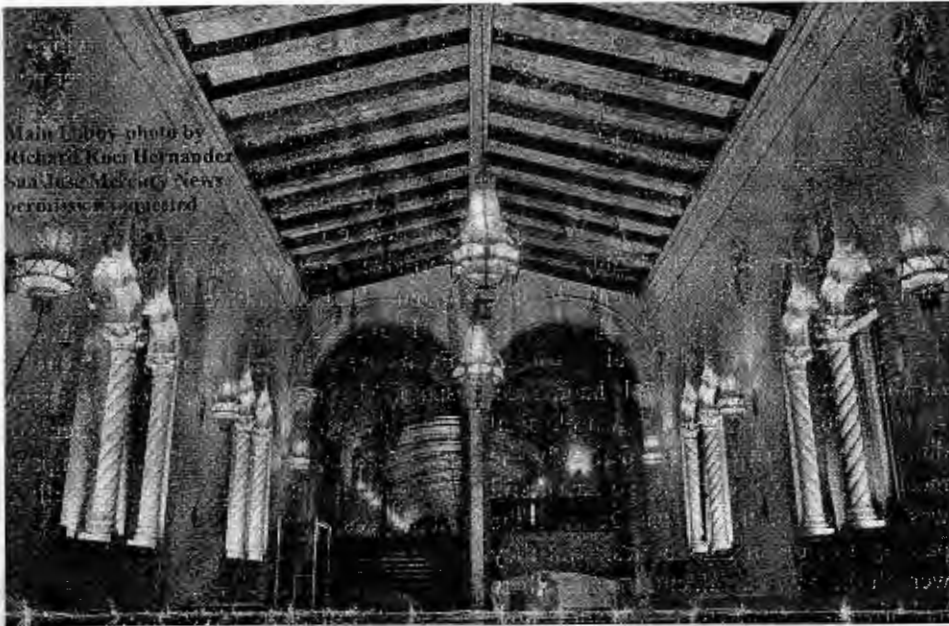
As noted in the last Windsheet Dave Goggin has made several suggestions for additional advertising. To make these suggestions work he needs help. The more volunteers he gets the less work for any single volunteer, or the more of the suggestion that can be implemented. Please help!

As a parting note, it's time for the election of Board Members for the coming year. The Board is the group officially responsible for the club's finances and assets. It only takes a little time and attendance at six meetings a year. If you are interested in helping the club and working with those to whom you entrust the mighty Wurlitzer, contact any Board Member. While I am writing this I am waiting for responses from several people I have asked to be on the nominating committee.

**Editor's Console**  
Bob Shipley



**Next Windsheet Deadline:**  
November 5. Contact me: by email [bshipley1@atmc.net](mailto:bshipley1@atmc.net), by phone (650) 968-3290, or by US mail 1734-9 W. El Camino, Mountain View 94040.



Main Lobby photo by  
Richard Kuer Hernandez  
San Jose Mercury News  
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## First Impressions of San Jose's California Theatre

Frank La Petra

I enjoyed the third performance of Mozart's Figaro from a choice seat in the Orchestra at this marvelously restored Theatre, now also a first-rate Performing Arts Center

On entering the original lobby off 1<sup>st</sup> Street through the main doors past the new Box Office on the right, you immediately are treated to a step back in time to the opulent grandeur of yesteryear. To your left and right are arches in the walls. The ones on the right have the swell shutters for the lobby organ that is not yet finished behind them. A location for the console is not yet evident.

Continuing on and up a few steps, the Concessions are ahead and the Dress Circle is to the right. You may also go down a few steps from the Main Lobby and the Orchestra Level is available. This level also serves the new, more modern, lobby for the Market Street entrance.

From the Dress Circle Level you may go up a few more steps to the Balcony Level.

If you are mobility handicapped, there is no worry, as every level and all seating classes are handicap accessible by elevator.

I had purposely arrived as the doors opened. I wanted to look around. (I knew I would be attending the Opera on that Tuesday, so I did not go to the Public tours the prior Friday.)

Dick Taylor and Ed Stout of Quality Pipe Organ Services had a few weeks ago graciously given me a personal tour through much of the back, under and over areas. Scaffolding and all was up then and

so all I saw was the facilities shrouded beauty and capability, including the greatly expanded and modern stage, dressing and ballet practice rooms, organ chambers, blowers and relay areas. This included how some of the stage lighting is hidden, when not needed, by trolleys that let the lighting standards be out or hidden, as appropriate.

The Market Street Entrance is totally new and makes no pretenses of yesteryear, but is tastefully done.

The Restrooms were spacious and fully handicap accessible. There will, in the early future, be a restaurant on the First Street side in a notch to the right of the Main Entrance and the Auditorium, which is back from the street a substantial distance.

### The Theatre itself—What a thrill to enter that glorious space.

I eschewed having an Usher help me find my seat (which, incidentally was the identical choice one I had worked up to over the years of subscribing at the Montgomery Theatre). I wanted to take my time and savor the surroundings, look into the spacious Orchestra Pit, see how lighting was hidden, admire the beautiful and very open organ grilles, look up into the Dress Circle and beyond to the Balcony. Even the end of the Balcony was not that far away. The live acoustic environment and restored and repainted plaster surfaces of the auditorium should make the organ speak clearly and fill the hall nicely.

Then the Lights went down and the Orchestra started the Overture—pure

Windsheet

delight. I was very close to the Orchestra and there are now more players (the number of players was limited by what the Montgomery Theatre pit could contain). Loud, yes, but not too loud. Like being in my favorite seat at an organ concert—at the apex of an equilateral triangle formed by the chambers and my seat.

Curtain up and the opera really started. The sight line was stage-level and the front wall of the pit directed the orchestra up and over me, so the singers were not drowned out. In my opinion, great balance.

The house was a sell-out, but when the intermissions came, there was no sense of crowding.

When Figaro was over, it did take a few minutes to get to the street, as everyone wanted to go out at once.

Finally parking is easy and free, if you don't mind walking two blocks. Closer, if you are willing to pay to park.

## Nor-Cal Board Meeting

October 12—7:30 pm at the home of Art and Evelyn Woodworth, 600 Coventry Road, Kensington, CA 94707. Phone 510-524-7452. All members are encouraged to attend. Please contact the meeting host so that there can be sufficient chairs and refreshments.

**Open Console** for members will be held on Sunday Oct. 10 and November 21 from 1-5 PM. at Berkeley Community Theatre. *Important* Call the Nor-Cal voice mail at (510) 644-2707 on that Sunday morning to confirm theatre availability. If there will be Open Console, enter via the back-stage door at 1930 Allston Way.

## Donations

We thank **Harold Lentz** of Alamo for his donation that will help us preserve the Theatre Organ and present it in performance in our community.

**Chairman's  
Windline**



The Berkeley school board has finally made a decision and we will have a concert series starting this fall. The late decision (*Chairman's Windline continued on Page Three*)

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## Other Events

**S**unday Oct 31, 3 PM—Free Concert Celebrating the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 4m/20+r Kimball Theatre/Church organ restored by **Ed Stout**. **Keith Thompson** will perform the program for AGO. First Christian Science Church, Franklin and California St., San Francisco. Street parking is limited with some space available across the street at Whole Foods market. Car-pooling is advisable.

**S**ierra Chapter Towe Sunday Pops Concert—**Bert Kuntz** October 17 at 2 PM, Towe Auto Museum, 2200 Front St. Sacramento, CA \$7/Adults, \$6/Seniors

Silent Film “The Cat and the Canary” cued by **Paul Quarino** on the Wurlitzer Friday, October 22, 8 PM, Towe Auto Museum, 2200 Front St., Sacramento, CA \$10 at the door Contact: 916-442-6802

Sierra Chapter’s Seventh Annual George Wright Memorial Concert with **Ron Rhode**, Sunday, November 14 at 2 PM. Grant Union High School, 1400 Grand Avenue, Sacramento \$10/Adults (at the door), \$8/Advance

**A**ngelino’s Restaurant—3/13 Wurlitzer, 3121 Williams Road, San Jose. **Dean Cook** provides accompaniment to the silent film *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* Sunday, October 17 at 4 PM—call (408) 243-6095 for reservations

**D**esert Winds featuring the Magnificent Seven—Phoenix, AZ Nov. 26–28

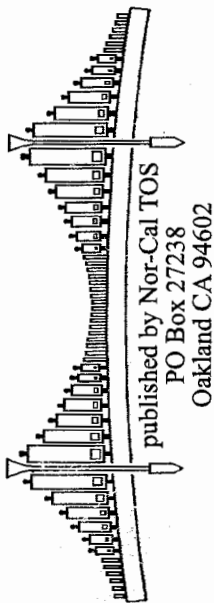
Presented by: Valley of the Sun Chapter, ATOS Fri., Nov. 26, 2:30 PM, **Walt Strony**—7:30 PM, **Lyn Larsen**, Orpheum Theatre Sat., Nov 27, 9:30 am, **Rob Richards**, Orpheum Theatre

Sat., Nov 27, 1:30 PM, **Lew Williams**, First Presbyterian Church

Sat., Nov. 27, 7:30 PM, **Ron Rhode**, Orpheum Sun., Nov. 28, 9:00 am, **Charlie Balogh**—1:00 PM, **Jelani Eddington**, Organ Stop Pizza

**H**eadquarters: Wyndham Hotel, 50 E. Adams St., Phoenix, AZ - 602-333-0000

Complete event package price: \$149 (includes concert admissions, BBQ Lunch at Rockin’ R Ranch and transportation to Organ Stop Pizza and the Rockin’ R Ranch) Information: [www.desertwinds.info](http://www.desertwinds.info) or 623-877-0635 or [Aaretiree@cox.net](mailto:Aaretiree@cox.net)



### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NOR-CAL THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY, Inc.

*A Chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society*

ATOS is dedicated to promoting the tradition of the theatre pipe organ and public understanding and appreciation of the instrument and its music, and shall aid in any way possible the preservation of theatre organs through rehabilitation of instruments and fostering the arts of playing, building, voicing and maintenance. If you would like to join us, please write or call: **Mr. John O’Neill at (510) 632-9177, PO Box 27238, Oakland, California 94602-0438.**

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Dues are \$40 National ATOS and \$20 Nor-Cal (\$60 total) per year. Spouse and children living at home may be included in your membership. We hope you will join us to help preserve and enjoy these great instruments.