


AUGUST 2020

Newsletter of the NorCal Theatre Organ Society
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P. O. Box 625, Berkeley, CA 94701-0625

Berkeley Community Theatre
1930 Allston Way, Between Milvia Street &
Martin Luther King, Jr. Way

NEXT NORCAL EVENT

Due to the COVID-19 virus, everything in the San Francisco Bay Area is shut down until further notice. Your NorCal Board of Directors will keep you posted as to the next NorCal event via both our website and (we hope) the next issue of the Windsheet.

NORCAL TOS MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Due to the pandemic, NorCal Theatre Organ Society will not have access to any venues for the foreseeable future. Therefore, the NorCal Board has decided to extend all current memberships for one year.

BERKELEY COMMUNITY THEATRE CONSTRUCTION

As previously reported in the Windsheet, construction work started Monday, June 15 and is scheduled to finish in August 2022. During this two-year period, NorCal is to have no official access to the building. However, Neal Wood managed to take some construction photos the other day.



Neal also got a look at some of the drawings. They show that the handicap elevator and its protrusion into the house (AKA "The Wart") will be removed and will be replaced by a code-

compliant ramp from the house to stage level. This will restore the stage sight lines that had been blocked by the wart.



CHAIRMAN'S WIND LINE

Since the passing of Ken Chrome, we still don't know the plans of Steve Hansen or others in the Chrome Organ Company regarding the completion of organ work for their customers, in particular, the reinstallation of the original Oakland Paramount console, relay upgrade to the latest model of the Uniflex organ relay system, and installation of the 16-foot Bombards, all to be paid for by the bequest of former NorCal Crew Chief Bill Schlotter.

At the time of his passing, Ken Chrome was working on the restoration of a Kimball organ in the mid-west. The Trustee of Bill's estate, Tom Delay, will be following up on this. Our interest in the Paramount restoration is piqued by the fact that Bill Schlotter's understanding with the Paramount was that NorCal members (only) would be able to have some concerts in the theatre in return for his benevolent payment for the restoration of their organ.

With the Pandemic, live concerts everywhere are on hold. More than likely, there will be a solution to the Pandemic before the scheduled 2 year completion of the renovation of the Berkeley Community Theatre, in August 2022.

Here's a reprise on the expertise of Ken Chrome, a master craftsman, who restored and installed pipe organs, and faithfully replicated Wurlitzer consoles. Ken built the following three Wurlitzer style consoles.

Gudy



5-manual console in the style of Radio City Music Hall for Mr. & Mrs. Cliff Hipkins of New York



5-manual console for the Sanfilippo Palace de la Musique in Barrington Hills, Illinois



5-manual console originally built for John Ledwon in Agora Hills, CA.

Now installed in the Carma Labs in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

WELCOME NEW MEMBER!

We have a new member, David Richie of San Jose. He owns the 3/12 Wurlitzer that was in the Santa Clara Pizza and Pipes.

RIP BILL FIELD

William C. Field 10/4/1939 – 6/28/2020

Excerpted from Danny Tokusato's extensive obituary in the Los Angeles Theatre Organ Society's Organ Log.

William (Bill) C. Field was born on October 4, 1939 in Los Angeles. He found his love and future avocation when he wandered through the Barker Bros. department store in downtown L.A. with his grandmother and was captivated by the sound of a pipe organ that serenaded browsing shoppers. Bill begged his parents to learn the pipe organ, which he began studying at the tender age of 8. Seeing his talent, potential and passion for the organ, Bill's mother bought him a Hammond organ and encouraged his growth as an artist. By the time he was 12, Bill was hired as the organist at the Los Angeles Theatre on South Broadway playing organ preludes and has never wandered far from the instrument.

Bill and his business partner and friend Bill Coffman (the "two Bills") found their prized possession – a 1925 Mighty Wurlitzer Theater Pipe Organ – for sale at the long closed and derelict Fox West Coast Theater in Long Beach. In 1958, the two Bills borrowed \$2,000 from a credit union to buy the instrument and installed it themselves within 2 years at Bill's home in South Los Angeles. Here, the men performed live concerts to adoring audiences on a weekly basis.

Needing a larger venue to house the organ and accommodate the growing crowds, the two Bills searched all over Los Angeles for a permanent home for their Wurlitzer. Finally, they located a worthy location in El Segundo in a boxy neighborhood building formerly known as the "State Theater" which originally opened in

1921 as a silent picture movie house. After its hey-day, the building also served as a Baptist Church among other ventures.

The empty shell of the State Theater served as their blank canvas to create a place where audiences could experience the full spectacle of watching a movie during Hollywood's heyday in a grand movie palace that also featured live music. Here, the two Bills opened Old Town Music Hall in 1968, a one of a kind venue in sleepy El Segundo, a time warp and hidden gem waiting to be discovered by all who appreciate classic movies, music, and the powerful yet ephemeral sound of the theater pipe organ.

In addition to the installation of their prized Wurlitzer which now has over 2,000 pipes and 244 keys on four keyboards and various sounds, the two Bills installed plush theater seats, ruby red carpets, majestic curtains, huge chandeliers, and framed the stage and movie screen in grand proscenium. Thousands of concerts and movies have entertained audiences ever since.

After Coffman's death in 2001, Bill continued to improve the ambiance of the Old Town Music Hall with projects large and small. With Coffman gone, Bill carried on alone, presiding as host as well as house organist. At the beginning of each show, Bill would make his way up to the organ and introduces the upcoming program. Then, turning his attention to the console of the Mighty Wurlitzer, the theater is darkened as the spot-light intensifies its focus on Bill. The curtains slowly open, almost teasingly, to reveal a glowing and eerily beautiful organ that springs to life under the orchestration of Bill, the Wizard of the Wurlitzer! The audience is treated to a musical explosion and sing-along before intermission and the feature movie.



Bill Field's Old Town Music Hall, El Segundo, California

Bill ensured the survival of the Old Town Music Hall by taking under his wing and mentoring one of these followers, Edward Torres, who was a young 14-year-old aspiring theater organist when he first came to the theater. Over the last two years, as Bill's skills deteriorated, he increasingly relied on Edward (now 24) to play the shows at the Old Town Music Hall; effectively handing over the reins to Edward, a trusted and dedicated disciple of Bill's passion and vision. With hard work and dedication, Edward has

become a great talent in his own right and has committed to continuing Bill's tradition by literally taking Bill's seat at the Mighty Wurlitzer and now serves as CEO of Old Town Music Hall.

On June 28, 2020; at the age of 80, Bill succumbed to prostate cancer and passed away peacefully at his home in South Los Angeles surrounded by loved ones

OPEN CONSOLE SCHEDULE

Due to limitations on access to BCT and the COVID-19 virus there will be no NorCal open console sessions anywhere until further notice.

OTHER VENUES

All of these venues are currently closed to the public due to the COVID-19 virus. LISTED PLAYING TIMES ARE FROM BEFORE THE SHUT DOWN. Their opening dates cannot be known at this time but will likely be announced on their web sites. Please note that the days/hours may change.

Grand Lake Theatre - 3/17 Wurlitzer. 3200 Grand Avenue, Oakland. Intermission music played by **Gordon Pratt** (Fridays) and **Bob Reichert** (Saturdays); **Bill Coale** Relief Organist. (510) 452-3556. www.renaissancerialto.com

Paramount Theatre - 4/26 Wurlitzer. 2025 Broadway, Oakland. Public tours on first and third Saturdays of the month at 10:00 am, excluding holidays and holiday weekends. No reservations are necessary for these tours. Tours begin promptly at 10:00 am at the Box Office entrance on 21st Street near Broadway. The tour lasts about two hours and provides a full and informative view of the Theatre. Cameras are allowed. Admission is \$5.00 per person. Children must be at least 10 years old and adult chaperones are required. Please note that some areas of the tour are not wheelchair accessible. www.paramounttheatre.com

Stanford Theatre - 3/21 Wurlitzer. 221 University Avenue, Palo Alto. See their **Silent Film Schedule**. The organ is played before and between films by **Bill Taylor**, **David Hegarty**, or **Jerry Nagano**. (650) 324-3700. stanfordtheatre.org

California Theatre, San Jose (Fox Theatre) - 4/21 Wurlitzer & 2/10 Wurlitzer. 345 South First Street. The 2/10 Style 216 Wurlitzer lobby organ is played before all scheduled performance. <http://sanjosetheaters.org/theaters/california-theatre/>

California Theatre, Pittsburg - 3/10 Robert Morton. 351 Railroad Avenue, Pittsburg. The 3-manual console is now playing. <http://www.pittsburgcaliforniaattheatre.com/>

Palace of the Legion of Honor - 4/63 E. M. Skinner. Lincoln Park, San Francisco Presidio. Concerts Saturday afternoons at 4:00 pm. See legionofhonor.famsf.org and scroll to "visit/upcoming events."

ABOUT NORCAL THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY

NorCal Theatre Organ Society is a Chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society (ATOS). 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 call, email, or write to:**

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JOIN NORCAL THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY

Dues are \$20 for NorCal TOS only. For an additional \$50 you may also join National ATOS (\$70 total) per year for full voting memberships in both NorCal and ATOS as well as your subscription to *Theatre Organ* magazine, the six times a year glossy journal of ATOS. Spouse and children living at home may be

included in both NorCal and ATOS memberships. We hope you will join us to help preserve and enjoy these great instruments!

If you join NorCal now, you will be able to take advantage of the 9-month membership period extension as explained on Page 1.

HOW OFTEN DO WE PUBLISH THE WINDSHEET?

We had been publishing whenever NorCal had an event scheduled. During the Corona Virus shutdown we will publish as copy accumulates. If you have anything to contribute, please do so. *Stay safe – hope to see you all soon!*

GET YOUR WINDSHEET BY E-MAIL!

Would you like to receive your copy of the Windsheet by email? It will be in full color; it will be wrinkle and tear-free; it will arrive sooner; and you will save NorCal the cost of postage and envelopes! If so, please contact our Membership Chair, Neal Wood at the address shown below.

NORCAL THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY CONTACTS:

Please see the NorCal website at noralcaltos.org for current & recent past Windsheets in [pdf](#) format along with an up-to-date Calendar of Events.

You may reach NorCal directly at NorcalTOS@outlook.com.

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