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Newsletter of the NorCal Theatre Organ Society
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Berkeley Community Theatre
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Martin Luther King, Jr. Way

JIM RIGGS - RIP

Editor's Note: The next issue of Theatre Organ Magazine will be filled with tributes to Jim and his illustrious career as an internationally known artist. But to us in NorCal, Jim was also a local guy who made it big. Many of us have fond memories of when we first heard that kid from Lafayette playing at one of our local venues. NorCal member Roy Powlan wrote the following reminiscence.

JIM RIGGS - THE EARLY YEARS, A REMINISCENCE OF ROY K. POWLAN

I first met James Patrick Riggs when we were 14 years old at a church retreat in the Santa Cruz mountains called Mt. Hermon. I was playing the organ in the small rustic chapel when Jim walked in. That was the beginning of a close friendship that was founded on and remained focused on our mutual love of the organ for a lifetime.

Jim lived in Lafayette as did I and we spent much time together at his parent's home listening to theater organ records, especially the Farewell to the Fox series. One day Jim was so excited to introduce me to his new friends, just a half mile or so bike ride down the road from his parent's place, Aura and Fred Edwards. Jim had visited their home on a high school field trip. They had a home installation of a fine Wurlitzer 3/19 pipe organ in a beautiful large, new and modern hillside home. The restoration and meticulous installation was done by Curt Wood and Aura (the organist half, who played



Roy and Jim at Berkeley Community Theatre

very well) kept Curt busy maintaining the instrument in top shape. The coincidences could not have been better for the development of Jim's young talent.

Although Jim had taken some stride piano lessons from a very good teacher, Lee Green, he knew little about playing the theatre organ but knew that this was the instrument on which he could best express himself. Aura liked Jim very much and

22ND GEORGE WRIGHT MEMORIAL CONCERT

Walter Strony at the mighty Wurlitzer

2:00 pm, Sunday, November 13th

1400 Grand Avenue

Sacramento

Advance Tickets \$12, General \$15, Students Free

Box Office opens 1:00 pm

allowed him as much time as he wanted to play the organ, leaving him alone while she gardened or went shopping. Jim admitted that he made a lot of noise at first but gradually learned his way around the console.

During these high school years Jim and I took the Greyhound bus into Oakland (pre BART) and went to as many churches as possible persuading them to allow us to play their pipe organs which was surprisingly successful. Jim always played theater stylings on them and he got better and better. This is also about when Jim discovered Sydney Torch and those old church organs too, never sounded better.



Jim at the Seattle Paramount - Photo by Rudy Frey

In late high school while searching out organs to play, Jim and I visited Chaney's Pianos and Organs in Walnut Creek owned and operated by the effervescent Bob Chaney. He had recently taken in a Wurlitzer pipe organ on trade for a Baldwin electronic (!) and was having it restored, added to and installed in his home, also in Lafayette, by the legendary Richard Villemin from Porterville. Bob had also purchased directly from George Wright his "black beauty" 3 manual console that had been rescued from his latest studio fire but the firemen had to chop the cable to get it to safety. I was assigned the task of ringing out the double cotton

covered AND lacquered wire console cable among other routine installation jobs.

When that instrument got playing (3/12 I believe) Jim was a house regular and more importantly came into contact with many immensely talented organists who were drawn to Bob's home not just for the Wurlitzer but by Bob's great outgoing personality and hospitality. John Seng, Tom Sheen, and many, many others from the burgeoning pizza organ chains were often there and Jim listened and learned.

About that time we both got our driver's licenses and the theater organ world exploded open for us - Monterey, Santa Rosa and Sacramento. We got to the Avenue Theater in San Francisco where Geoff Hansen was as accommodating then as he is now to opening the use of the Wurlitzer to new talent. While there, Jim came to appreciate the fine stylings of Bob Vaughn whose silent movie work was the best. Of course, Jim accompanied silent film his entire career. He always learned from the best.

Jim's first job was in high school at that time playing piano in a Walnut Creek ice cream parlor. He didn't last long, finding the piano too limited.

His first public pipe organ event was also about that very busy time playing for Sierra Chapter ATOS at Larry Weid's Big Top Pizza in Sacramento. It was well attended and Jim gave ample credit to Fred and Aura Edwards at that very first concert as he did for years thereafter. She in turn was intensely proud of Jim.

About then I had unrestricted use of the Style "E" Wurlitzer owned by Sierra Chapter and installed in the Golden Bear Playhouse at the State Fairgrounds while I was at CSUS. Jim spent many days there learning smaller registrations and how to put the musical intent of the composer above all else, a strong trait in all of Jim's arrangements.

From there he was off to The Bella Roma pizza parlor in Martinez, Ye Olde Pizza Joynt in San Lorenzo, and stints or fill-ins at a majority of the pizza restaurants of which there were many. All the

while we were driving to anywhere a Wurlitzer could be found.

Following high school Jim and I took a lifetime Wurlitzer car trip and drove to British Columbia and back with a copy of the Judd Walton Wurlitzer book and we tried to get in as many as possible. Jim played the Coos Bay Egyptian Theatre before an audience, entirely impromptu. He also played the wonderful Mt. Baker Theater, both Seattle pizza restaurants, and the Leninger residence Wurlitzer on the way back. These few are but the highlights.

Jim then spent a year at Chapman College where he found a Style "D" in a nearby theatre and then it was then back to the Bay Area for his pizza restaurant jobs, Grand Lake Theater, and Avenue Theater presentations.

Importantly it was also at this time that we first came to know Edward Millington Stout, III at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. Ed, and for the rest of Jim's life, generously shared with Jim his perspicacious observations which even now extends to every corner of the theatre organ world - and Jim relished his wisdom. Lifetime friends.

There are so many other fascinating stories from these early years but from this point on Jim's public story is more well known.

Jim's proudest lifetime accomplishment, it must be stated, was that he was the sole house organist for the Paramount Theater, Oakland for 21 years taking over after the untimely death of everyone's friend James (Rosey) Roseveare.

Truly- "The song is ended but the melody lingers on". Jim's influence will live on in the many young organists in whom Jim took a personal interest in right to the end but especially in his most musically devoted friend, the incomparable David Gray. Lifetime friendships are rare and beautiful things. How could we have begun to imagine the future from what began as a chance encounter?

BOB SUFFEL – RIP

As reported on the lower right hand corner of page 53 of the latest (October 2022) issue of

Theatre Organ Magazine, we lost Bob in late August. He was a long time member of both NorCal and Sierra Chapters. The magazine will have a Closing Chord in their next issue. We hope to have some reminiscences of our own in the next Windsheet.

CHAIRMAN'S WIND LINE

I'd like to thank Kevin King for hosting our NorCal Chapter picnic at his organ studio in Walnut Creek Saturday July 23rd. Members filled the studio after eating their individual picnic lunches. Kevin demonstrated his exceptional number of tuned percussions and traps and played a delightful set of selections. Walt Strony was at the picnic and he consented to play after Kevin. Walt was scheduled to play the National Convention in San Diego, but was forced to cancel due to testing positive for COVID. It was a delight to hear him play at Kevin's studio.



JULY PICNIC AT KEVIN KING'S STUDIO

Many Norcal and Sierra members came to Kevin King's backyard organ studio for a picnic, concert, and open console.. Kevin started the concert with a trip through the organ, demonstrating the sounds of various ranks of pipe, tuned and un[tuned] percussions, and effects. His playlist included:

- It Was Just One of those Things
- Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea
- Again
- They Can't Take That Away from Me
- Night and Day
- How Come You Do, Do, Me Like You Do?
- Saint Louis Blues

A special treat was guest Walter Strony who played three numbers:

- Blue Chimes
- Dance of the Blue Danube
- Medley from "Sound of Music"

This was followed by many of those present taking advantage of open console on one of the “real things” – a great Wurlitzer pipe organ.

ATOS SAN DIEGO CONVENTION

Rudy Frey writes:

The ATOS Annual Convention in San Diego July 3rd - 7th was attended by 158 including 9 NorCal Members: Donald Daly, Rudy & Gail Frey, Wayne & Esther Joseph, Christopher Kenward, Jerry Nagano (who was a featured artist), Dick Taylor, and Carol Zerbo. This was the first live convention since the 2019 Convention in Rochester, NY, the production of live conventions having been interrupted by the pandemic. The convention Committee budgeted for an attendance of 140, so hopefully costs were covered. For our members who belong to ATOS, these notes will be somewhat redundant, as you have received, and will receive, more information about the convention in “Theatre Organ” magazine.

The Convention Hotel, the Westin Gaslight, named for the tourist section of the city in which it is located, was an excellent modern (or redecorated) hotel with large rooms, one block from the Balboa Theatre, where the majority of the convention events were held.

Gail and I did not attend the Overture Day, the first day of the convention. There was a visit to the “Museum of Making Music” in Carlsbad, and a silent movie at the Balboa Theatre, Harold Lloyd’s “The Freshman” scored by Clark Wilson, followed by an interview with Harold Lloyd’s granddaughter, Suzanne Lloyd at the Balboa Theatre.

There were 7 organ concerts, and 2 silent movies during the convention. There were three concert venues.

The San Diego Chapter organ, a 4/24 Wurlitzer, once installed in Arden Pizza and Pipes in Sacramento, is installed in Trinity Presbyterian Church. Recitals were presented there by Mark Herman, Jonas Nordwall, and Ryoki Yamaguchi. The young organists competition was also held there.

Convention organists, in my experience, are always very capable. Usually the organists are well known to ATOS members. This year, Japanese organist Ryoki Yamaguchi played for an ATOS convention for the first time. With one exception, Sukiyaki by Kyu Sakamoto, his selections were familiar to me, ranging from Disney themes to light classics, all well played. His playing and his comments in guarded English were well received by the audience. His background with Roland Organs explained his familiarity with theatre organ registration. There are probably not too many theatre pipe organs to practice on in Japan!

On the 4th of July, Jelani Eddington played a concert which included classical and patriotic selections on the Spreckels outdoor 4/81 classical Austin organ in Balboa Park. The organ and Pavilion were donated by Sugar magnates John and Adolph Spreckels. Before the concert, a meal was served in the colonnade of the organ pavilion. As the patriotic numbers were concluding, fireworks over San Diego Bay could be seen and heard from the park, an appropriate end of the holiday.

The 1335 seat Balboa Theatre’s 4/23 “Wonder Morton” theatre organ was originally installed in 1928 in Lowes Valencia Theatre in Jamaica, Queens, NY. Similar to the Berkeley Community Theatre, the organ is installed over the proscenium of the theatre. In addition to the Overture Day program, four other convention events were held from Sunday to Thursday at the Balboa. Dave Wickerham, Jerry Nagano and Ken Double played concerts there. Ken Double, currently staff organist at the Atlanta Fox, was convention MC. Walter Strony was scheduled to play at the Balboa, but he tested positive for COVID and was unable to appear so Ken Double substituted for him.

Juan Cardona Jr. accompanied Mel Brooks 1976 “Silent Movie” at the Balboa Theatre. The 20th Century Fox silent movie was in color. It included 10 well known actors in addition to Mel Brooks, who starred in, and directed the hilarious film. Jeanine Pray and Josh Lopez provided various sound effects.

Convention Chairman Rosemary Bailey and her committee did an outstanding job producing an excellent convention after a 2-year COVID hiatus. Our talented host played the Wurlitzer at the young artists competition at Trinity Church and played the grand piano informally after the banquet at the classically ornate U. S. Grant Hotel. The cost of the banquet, like the lunch in Balboa Park was included in the basic convention registration.

The 2024 Convention will be held in Chicago. The Chicago Chapter is listing 8 organs to be played for the convention, including the 4/90 Wurlitzer in the Carmex Lip Balm warehouse in Franklin, Wisconsin, and the Sanfilippo 5/80 Wurlitzer in Barrington, Illinois, either of which would be worth the trip in itself.

“OLD” PARAMOUNT CONSOLE GETTING A NEW HOME

Chris Nichols writes:

Dick Taylor has acquired the old Paramount console. Today Dick Taylor, Carol Zerbo, Neal Wood, Kevin King, Bill Coale, and I with assistance from Paramount stage manager Kurt Dryer and a couple of other staff members removed the console from the theatre.



Editor's Note:

“Old” refers to the console brought in to the Paramount when it reopened as a performing arts center. The original console was not available at that time. Before coming in to the Paramount, the “old” console received much expert restoration by Ed Stout and Dick Taylor.

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. No organ events currently scheduled. www.paramounttheatre.com

Stanford Theatre - 3/21 Wurlitzer. 221 University Avenue, Palo Alto. Reported to be reopened – check schedule. stanfordtheatre.org

California Theatre, San Jose (Fox Theatre) - 4/21 Wurlitzer & 2/10 Wurlitzer. Schedule unknown. <http://sanjosetheaters.org/theaters/california-theatre>

California Theatre, Pittsburg - 3/10 Robert Morton. 351 Railroad Avenue, Pittsburg. Schedule unknown.

<http://www.pittsburgcaliforniatheatre.com>

Palace of the Legion of Honor - 4/63 E. M. Skinner. Lincoln Park, San Francisco Presidio. Saturdays at 4:00 pm.

<https://legionofhonor.famsf.org/education/organ-concerts>

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 contact our Membership Chair Neal Wood at:

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Normally NorCal Theatre Organ Society dues are \$20 per year. However, if you join now they

will not be due until we return to having member meetings. For an additional \$50 you may also join National ATOS per year for a full voting membership plus six issues per year of *Theatre Organ Magazine*.

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 quarterly or 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 above.

NORCAL THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY CONTACTS:

Please see the NorCal website at norcaltos.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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