



THE POST HORN

Winter 2022

Official Newsletter of the
Bluegrass Chapter
American Theatre Organ Society
BGATOS.org

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By DANA ROSS

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Hello Everyone!

Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water, the great white Omicron shark appeared and put a damper on our attempts to return to the sea of normalcy. However, even with COVID and its variants, there have been several positive things happen with our chapter.

~~~ HOLIDAY PARTY ~~~

We were able to have a chapter Holiday party during the week between Christmas and New Year's. **Dr. John Landon** and **Ray Holt** graciously hosted our gathering and everyone in attendance had a great time. We enjoyed a potluck meal together and then were treated to some wonderful entertainment.

Tim Jones provided the accompaniment to the silent move "Big Business". He did an excellent job and in the true fashion of the theatre organ, the audience at times forgot it was a silent movie as the music and sound effects were so perfectly matched to the action on the screen.

Afterwards several of the members (**Tim Jones** on organ, **Brian Hunt** on organ, **Dave Pilkinton** on piano and **Dr. Landon** on piano) did an impromptu combined performance of Irving Berlin's White Christmas. It's unfortunate that there are no known recordings of this as it was one of the most entertaining experiences you could imagine.

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2021 Holiday Party

Attending the Chapter Holiday Party (group photo, center) from left to right are: Garry Marsh, Dana Ross, Tim Jones, Dr. John Landon, Brian Hunt, David Pilkinton, Scott Marsh and Tim Baker. Also in attendance and taking this photo is Holly Martin.

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~~~ THE KENTUCKY THEATRE ~~~

On Saturday December 19th, 2021, the big screen at the Kentucky Theater came to life for the first time since October of 2020 with a showing of "It's A Wonderful Life". As a result of the dedication and hard work of the Friends of the Kentucky Theatre (FOKT), the Kentucky Theater was once again open for business for a six-day run with the Holiday Movie Classics film festival.

The Theater's grand re-opening was Friday, January 28th, 2022 with a showing of "Paper Moon". **Dr. John Landon** greeted the opening night crowd with a pre-show concert on the chapter's Allen organ. The next night the Theater began their '100 Years of Film at the Kentucky' festival with the showing of two silent films from the 20's. **Tim Jones** treated the movie patrons to a pre-show organ concert that night.

Although there is still a lot of work to do and there were some workarounds in place, it was great to be able to enjoy movies in our favorite theater and to have our chapter members entertaining the crowd with the classic sounds of the theatre organ.



1. The Kentucky Theatre's marquee came to life for 'Christmas Classics'.
2. Dr. John Landon and Tim Jones (pictured) provided theatre organ pre-show concerts for the grand re-opening night patrons at the Kentucky Theatre.

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~~~ OUR ALLEN ORGAN ~~~

A big part of the movie film festivals at the Kentucky Theatre are the pre-show performances by members of the BG ATOS on our Allen organ.

When the theater closed last October, the chapter had to quickly remove our organ from the theater after the last show. Now with the re-opening of the theater and the showing of the Holiday Movie Classics film festival, it was time for the Allen organ to return.

While things were happening fast at the theater and we were operating on short notice, **Tim Jones**, **Brian Hunt** and **Dr. Landon** moved the organ from our chapter workshop to the theatre on Monday December 20th. Tim rented a trailer and met Brian at the workshop around 10:00. They loaded it up and were headed to the theater by 11:30 am. They met Dr. Landon at the theater when they arrived at noon and began unloading. By 3:30, the organ and the speakers were installed, the wiring was complete and the awesome sounds of the Allen organ filled the theater.

That night **Tim Jones** performed the pre-show followed by **Brian Hunt** and **Dr. Landon** on the subsequent nights. Tim, Brian and Dr. Landon are to be commended for making this happen as quickly as they did.

~~~ KENTUCKY THEATRE WURLITZER PROJECT ~~~

We are making progress with our project to restore the Kentucky Theatre Wurlitzer organ. Last Fall we had multiple work sessions focused on re-leathering the primary pneumatics, and we've already completed enough for three ranks.

As a precaution with the Omicron Covid variant, we won't have any sessions in the near term. We will monitor the situation and will look to restart the work sessions as soon as possible.

The regulators for the organ are being refurbished by City Organ Works in Chicago. While the project encountered some delays late last year, this work is proceeding again and we expect to have them completed soon.



Cathy Hunt, Dana Ross, Garry Marsh and Tim Jones attended this Fall work session. Brian Hunt was also in attendance and took this photo.

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~~~ MEMBER PERFORMANCES ~~~

Chapter members **Tim Baker**, **Tim Jones** and **David Pilkinton** recently performed for the "It's a Pilcher Pipe Organ Holiday Concert!" at Louisville's Memorial Auditorium.

The William H. Bauer Foundation hosted the festive concert featuring our three members and Margaret Dickinson playing lovely seasonal music on the world's largest Pilcher Pipe Organ. The concert was December 19th, 2021. It was a fundraiser for the William H. Bauer Foundation supporting its efforts to restore and maintain the [Pilcher Pipe organ at Memorial Auditorium](#).

~~~ FINAL THOUGHTS ~~~

While we're not out of the woods yet with all of our concerns over COVID, we are starting to see some positive movement towards a return to the previous world we knew. I realize there are much bigger issues and concerns to be dealt with, but the return of organ music to an open Kentucky Theatre, a public concert in Louisville and just being able to get together for social events are all things we've missed for most of the past two years. While no one can predict the future, I'm looking forward to better days.

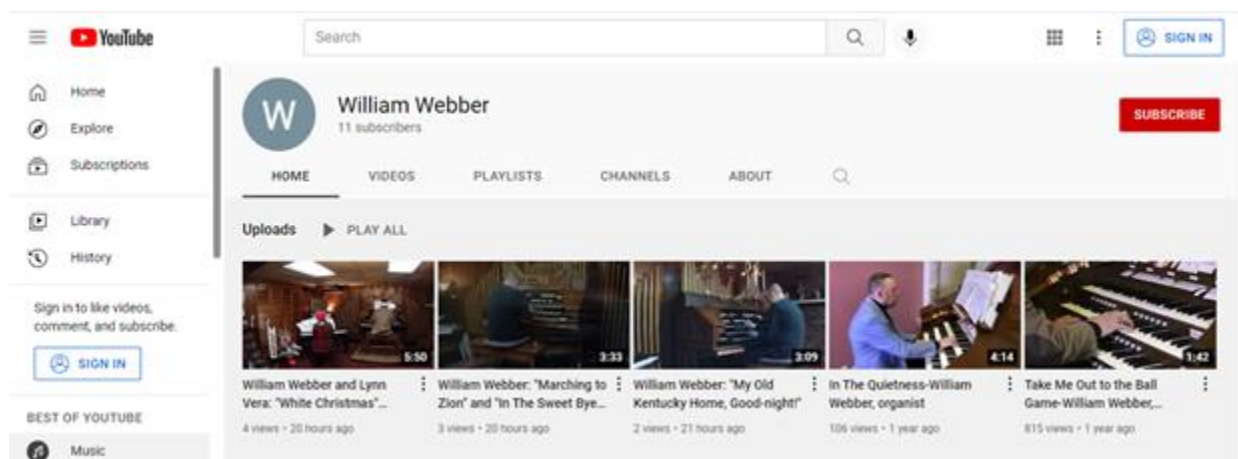
Thanks.

Dana Ross, BGATOS President

MEMBER NEWS

Did you know? William Webber is building his own **YouTube channel!**

At the current time he has 5 videos uploaded, and more will be added in the near future. [CLICK HERE](#) to view and Subscribe!



FEATURE ARTICLE:

MY INTERVIEW WITH FARNEY WURLITZER

By Dr. John Landon

Author of JESSE CRAWFORD, POET OF THE ORGAN: WIZARD OF THE MIGHTY WURLITZER (1974)

After I had determined that I was going to write a full-length biography of theatre organist Jesse Crawford as the basis of my Ph.D. dissertation at Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, I wondered how I might interview some of the principal characters responsible for his career. I knew that Farney R. Wurlitzer of the company that bore his name was still living, but he would not know who I was and might not be inclined to be interviewed.

I had a friend in the Central Indiana Chapter of ATOS, a Chapter which I had helped to found, who had installed a theatre pipe organ in his home. He was a deeply dedicated enthusiast of the instrument who attended a number of ATOS conventions before I had been able to attend any. His name was Frank May. I shared my idea with him shortly before he left for another ATOS convention and he took it upon himself to speak to Richard Simonton of California (the founder of ATOS) about my project. Frank came home from the convention and told me to contact Simonton directly, which I did. Simonton was very helpful in opening many doors to me – doors of people who knew Crawford and had worked with him. Among them was Farney Wurlitzer. As a result of his contact Farney agreed to be interviewed. He specified that no tape recordings be made of the interview so I took along a stack of legal size pads and wrote furiously during the interview, not wanting to miss a word.

Farney lived in a spacious home in Kenmore, a suburb of Buffalo. He had lived at that address since 1954 with his wife Grace who passed away in 1968. Mr. Wurlitzer was seated in a wheelchair, his lap covered by a robe. He welcomed me and said he would be happy to answer my questions. I had come prepared with quite a few of them. He was not a garrulous person but he answered each of my questions briefly and succinctly. However, after the interview had gone on for an hour or two he became more talkative. His memory was very clear. He could quote names, places and statistics with no hesitation. My interview with him took place June 5, 1971. He told me about his father, Rudolph Wurlitzer, founding the company in Cincinnati, and that he, himself, moved to North Tonawanda, New York in 1909 after his marriage to Grace Keene because his father had determined that the company should move there. He had actually begun work for the company beginning in 1904 and he shared his memories with me about visiting San Francisco in 1906, just after the great earthquake and fire when the city was still in ruins.

Farney Wurlitzer worked for the company for 65 years. He was placed in charge of the North Tonawanda factory and it was he who was the driving force behind the company's entrance into the theatre organ field. He said that the theatre organ had been "his baby" and he was delighted that it was being rediscovered at the time of my interview. He spoke of Jesse Crawford as the "best salesman Wurlitzer ever had", and of the arrangement which the company made with Victor Records to put on the label of every organ record by Jesse Crawford the words "Played on the Wurlitzer Organ". Thus every record sold became a piece of Wurlitzer advertising.

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We spoke of Robert Hope-Jones. He was kind in his assessment of him. He said that Hope-Jones was an inventor at heart and never gave up tinkering with the organ even when they were in the final stages of completion, adding greatly to the cost. He said that they finally had to bar Hope-Jones from the factory and put him on a pension.

Farney Wurlitzer's keen eye for business kept many an employee's check coming in when other companies were going under during the Great Depression. When sales of pipe organs declined Wurlitzer purchased the patent rights in 1933 to an automatic record-changing device. This led to a revival of interest in automatic musical instruments and Wurlitzer led the way with their juke boxes. The Wurlitzer Company continued to prosper under Farney's leadership (especially through the sale of pianos and later, electronic organs) when he became President in 1932 and Chairman of the Board in 1971. He retired from active duty at the factory in 1966 but was still connected to the company at the time of my interview.

Farney spoke also of his years of active community service. He was a major supporter of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra from its founding, was active in the Erie County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and was a member of Elks Lodge #860. He and his wife Grace established two Wurlitzer Foundation scholarships in the amount of \$1,500 each for two high school seniors who qualified through tests and were children or grandchildren of Wurlitzer employees.

Exactly eleven months after my interview, Farney Wurlitzer died at his home on May 6, 1972, at the age of 88. An era died with him. I am most grateful that I could talk with him in person about Wurlitzer theatre pipe organs and about the greatest theatre organist of his time – Jesse Crawford.



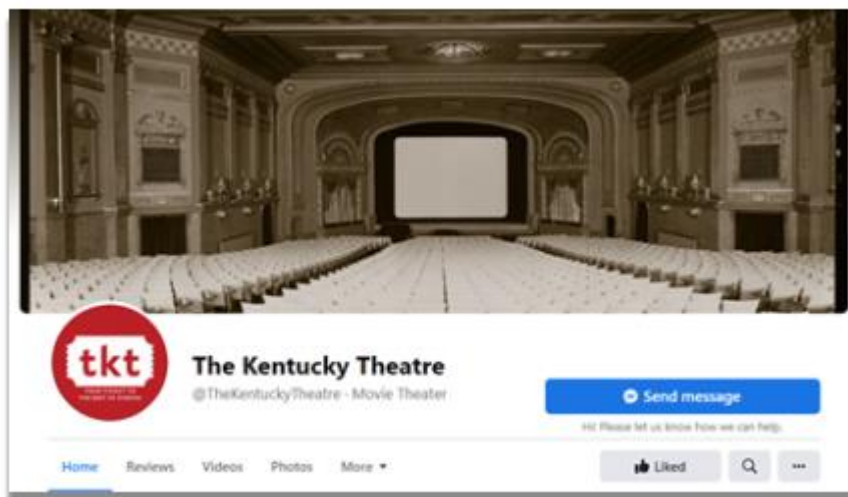
This article by Dr. John Landon was originally published in "The Poet", the newsletter of the (now-defunct) Jesse Crawford ATOS Chapter, and is reprinted here with permission.

NEWS FROM THE KENTUCKY THEATRE

The Kentucky Theatre is now presenting a very special film festival to celebrate their upcoming 100th anniversary! From now through October they're screening one film (or occasional double feature) per month from each decade of the Kentucky's long history, and charging the admission price you would have paid in that decade. For example, this month's inaugural double feature will cost you only 50 cents!

For more information and to get on their email list, please click on the images below to connect via Facebook and website.

FACEBOOK:



WEBSITE:



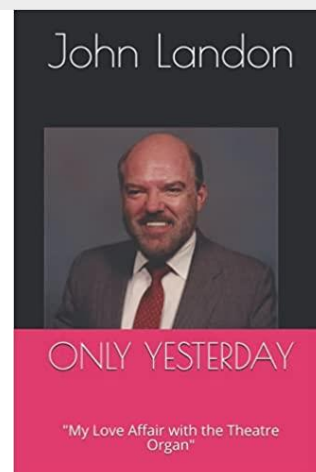
MARKETPLACE

DR. LANDON'S BOOK "**ONLY YESTERDAY**" IS AVAILABLE ON AMAZON!

Chapter Historian **Dr. John Landon** has published his new book, and it is already garnering 5-star reviews!

This is an autobiographical story of a young boy growing up in rural America in the late 1930's and '40's who developed a love affair with theatre organs, although he had never seen one.

"**Only Yesterday – My Love Affair with the Theatre Organ**" is available on Amazon in both Kindle and Paperback formats. [CLICK HERE](#) to get your copy now!



WILLIAM WEBBER'S CD: "**Something Old, New, Borrowed, and Blue**"

Bill Webber's new theatre organ CD, "**Something Old, New, Borrowed, and Blue**" was released in August 2021. It is the culmination of nearly two years' worth of work.

It was recorded on the 3-manual, ten-rank Robert Morton theatre pipe organ at the [Carolina Theater](#) in Greensboro, North Carolina. The CD features songs from Lady Gaga, Korla Pandit, Disney, C.A.J. Parmentier, Stephen Foster, and much more.

If you would like to order a copy, you may go to williamwebber.hearnow.com where you can listen to short snippets of each tune. Then click on **BUY FROM ARTIST** to go to the order page.



FEATURED VIDEO

This video, produced by PBS in 2021, showcases the **Mighty Morton** in the beautiful Ohio Theatre in Columbus, Ohio. Stage manager **Jim Cantrell** takes us behind the scenes and **Clark Wilson** provides music on the Morton in this delightful short documentary. [CLICK HERE](#) to watch the video.



THE POST HORN is an official publication of the Bluegrass Chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society. It is published quarterly in digital format and emailed to all Chapter members. Anyone may request a copy; simply fill out and submit the [“Contact Us” form on BGATOS.org](#).

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