

The Pine Piper



Newsletter of the Pine Tree Chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society

Fourth Quarter 2018 Edition

Pete's New Pipes

Several years ago, one of our more active members built a small portable pipe organ from a small direct-electric wind chest that kind of resembles a small calliope. It has more pipes (24) than keys (21) but the “entire organ” can be played via MIDI. The whole thing is small enough to be easily portable if not for the weight of the pipes. Despite their small size and number, the pipes weigh in at well over 50 lbs.

Another of our members has most of an Austin mixture in storage with no plans to use. We found the 24-pipe equivalent of Pete's mostly lead pipes in the middle of the mixture's much lighter ones. Once swapped out, the weight of the pipes was cut by more than half and the chest, with pipes installed, can now be lifted and set on a table-top by one person! Now Pete has a truly portable instrument that can be brought to events, shows, and anywhere, really, to demonstrate how a pipe organ works.



Pete's 1/1 Mighty Music Machine
(Dwight Burkard photo)

PTC-ATOS and P-AGO Joint Program

Earlier this year a couple of our members worked with the Portland chapter of the American Guild of Organists to see if they would be interested in presenting a musical program with us to the public on our 3/13 Wurlitzer. They not only agreed, but they put together a marvelous program of mostly theatrical music, played by classically-trained AGO artists. How could we resist! The AGO really put together and presented the show, accompanied by two singers, a French Horn player, and the inimitable George Shabo with his now-famous “Casey at the Bat”.

Our own theatre organist Seamus Gethicker led off with a very nice demo of what sets the theatre organ (and especially this one) apart from other organs the audience may be used to. And he followed that up with several nice show tunes that were tremulated and theatrical. Most of the rest of the show was with Chris Pelonzi, Dean of the Portland AGO, and Phil Thibault at the console. They were accompanied for different pieces by two singers (Soprano Christie Paul and Baritone Patrick Volker) and french horn player (Cathy Nichols), who were all very talented folks. And Chris demonstrated a silent film – a modern clip of penguins doing penguinny things and accompanied by a score called “Penguins’ Playtime”, by Nigel Ogden of the UK. All of the tunes played were pops or theatrical and most used the trem, which was a pleasant surprise for me.

One of the highlights for me was Chris's interest in the organ and our chapter, and also the enthusiasm and interest shown by a Loranger student who was there with her mother. She explored the console and chambers after the show and actually knew what a relay and regulator were – she pointed them out during our chamber tour and asked if that's what those were. She plays at home and is also interested in the mechanical side of the pipe organ. It was nice to see so much interest and some folks taking some of the cards and membership flyers home. If we get a new member or two, that's a HUGE plus!

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Photos from our joint program with the Portland AGO



Seamus Gethicker (PTC-ATOS)



Patrick Volker, Baritone and Chris Pelonzi, Organ



Chris Pelonzi, Organ and George Shabo perform
"Casey at the Bat" ("Steece-rike one!")



Christie Paul, Soprano and Chris Pelonzi, Organ



Cathy Nichols, French Horn and Phil Thibault, Organ



Chris Pelonzi accompanies silent short film
"Penguins Playtime"



Phil Thibault, Organ

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Pete's New Bells



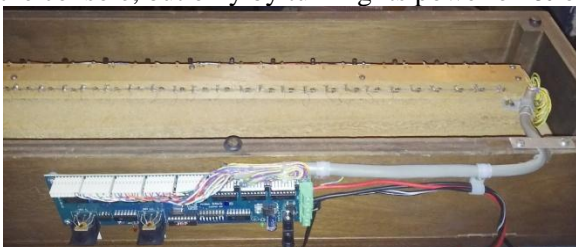
(Pete Haskell photo)

This unit, a "Thomas Orchestra Bells" was built by the Thomas Organ Co., probably around 1980. It consists of 30 metal bars, each with an electric striker, all mounted in a nice wooden box. The box has a lid which can be raised to increase the sound volume. The bars are arranged in chromatic order from notes G3 to C6.

I've added a MIDI to parallel decoder board, supplied by MIDI Boutique in Varna, Bulgaria. It accepts standard MIDI with the usual DIN connector, and provides a separate output pin for each note's striker. The unit requires two DC input voltages: 12 Volts for the MIDI board, and 24 volts for the strikers. I had to mount the board outside on the back, since there wasn't enough room to put it inside.

I originally intended to add the unit to my little calliope project, but decided that wouldn't be too practical, so I've added it to my Marr & Colton theatre organ instead. Since the best location for the unit seemed to be on the other side of the room, I'm using a long MIDI cable to connect it to the console. It can be played directly from the console keys, and also plays from MIDI files.

The sound is quite penetrating, and goes well with certain songs. It's something that you wouldn't want playing all the time! It's not controlled by a stop tab on the console, but only by turning its power on & off!



MIDI board wiring
(Pete Haskell photo)

The Wurlitzer at 91!

As you might imagine, when something gets to be over 90 years old, it needs a little tuck here and there to keep it looking good and working well. Our wonderful old box of wind, wire, and whistles from Wurlitzer has been getting a lot of attention over the past decade or so. Its regulators and all of its secondary pneumatic motors have been re-leathered. Dead notes have been addressed before they became so numerous that repair became an insurmountable task. And, overall, it's working at pretty close to 100% currently – still with air to the console and its original relay. We owe a debt of gratitude for the combined knowledge and sense of fearless adventure of our regular work crew (Pete, Dwight, Everett, Seamus, and Chapter Tech Jim) and extended family of knowledgeable friends, without whom this old girl would no doubt have played its last note many years ago. In keeping the organ in good mechanical condition, we have collectively learned a lot. It's nice to have a group of four or five folks who can take on small projects independently, thus allowing us to do several things in one work session. And it spreads the knowledge around, which is so important in an organization that takes care of such rare and specialized devices. And it's heartwarming to be able to call our former members and friends at EMCATOS and ATOS to ask a question and to receive valuable help, advice, and even parts. We're all in this hobby together and that all makes it work!

Early this year we re-leathered the swell shade "bumpers" that cushion the shades as they close so that they don't slam. They work like small leather air bags with a controlled leak (screw and bleeder hole) so that the shades actually *will* close. The bumpers are easy to reach and nice and big, so easy to take out and work on.



A "Box o' Bumpers", ready for re-installation
(Seamus Gethicker photo)

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We also spent part of one work session checking the wind pressure on all of the ranks and the speed and direction of the blower. Last year a concert was held at Babson College where the organ, normally in excellent condition, performed poorly. Investigation after the concert found the blower to be running backward! Since the organ still played, this led us to check the direction and speed of our blower, since it might not be as obvious as we thought if the three-phase circuit was rewired and the rotation possibly reversed. Ours was ok, BTW. We found the wind pressure on one rank to be low, requiring some adjustment to the regulator to correct. These are good and important periodic tests to perform and most professionals and larger clubs probably do this more often than we do.

Sometimes we find that we don't have the expertise to do something and have to contract for repairs. We found ourselves in that situation with the top octave of our Tuba pipes. Many would stop speaking just as they came into tune. Scrolls were already open all the way and the reed tricks we know didn't help enough. So we sent the pipes to OSI, who cut new reeds and cleaned up the scrolls and did those things that we can't do.



Repaired Tuba pipes
(Dwight Burkard photo)

And sometimes in the course of normal use, something breaks. We had a broken tab stop – first one I've ever seen. Don Phipps from EMCATOS generously donated us a collection of similar stops, one of which was a very close match. At our next work session, Jim laid out the basic plan for its replacement and we went to town. It went very well – took three hours or so, and I wouldn't want us to have to do this again anytime soon. But it went as planned and it looks good and works correctly!



That yellow Violin Celeste tab was replaced
(Pete Haskell photo)

Loranger School Program

In May 2018, Paul Schnell of the Portland AGO continued the tradition of now-retired Ray Cornils in offering an educational and entertaining program for the students of Loranger middle school. Ray and FOKO had developed this annual program as part of an educational "outreach" of sorts, to introduce young students to the pipe organ. Paul is an organist in the greater Portland area and has had a long career as a music educator in public schools. He is very knowledgeable about pipe organs. He is new to theatre organ but he took to the Wurlitzer like a fish to water. And the kids loved it! We hope he and FOKO will continue to make this an annual event at Loranger!

Our Summer Outing

In August, it's just too hot to work and meet in the gym of a closed-up school. So we turn that month's meeting into an "offsite" instead. This year we returned to "Haskell Hall" (Pete Haskell's living room), home to his beautiful Marr & Colton TPO and many other interesting projects and toys! In addition to a wonderful pot-luck lunch and some impromptu live and MIDI-performed selections, we had a sneak preview of an opera written by one of our newest members, Richard deCosta. The opera prominently features the theatre organ for much of its music. Richard is an amateur organist and professional drummer, so his music was very dynamic and lively.

We were also treated to a demo of Pete's calliope-like-pipe-organ-thingy which he built several years ago and has been updating and modifying since. See the picture in the first story of this newsletter.

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Photos from our summer outing...



Dwight Burkard, John Clark, Pete Haskell
(Pat Burkard photo)



Marr & Colton pipe chamber
(Dwight Burkard photo)

News Notes

ATOS Convention for 2019 is in Rochester, NY. Not too far away! June 30 through July 4. For more information, please visit the ATOS convention site [here](#).

FOKO's "Christmas with Kennerley" will feature Portland's newest municipal organist *James Kennerley* - Tuesday, December 18, 2018 [Click here for more info!](#)

Hit the Links:

ATOS (National):

www.atos.org

ATOS Radio (Streaming theatre organ music):

<http://www.atos.org/radio/>

Eastern MA Chapter ATOS:

www.emcatos.com

Friends of the Kotschmar Organ:

<http://www.foko.org/>

Pine Tree Chapter ATOS:

<http://theatreorgans.com/me/pinetree/>

Contact Us:

We are the Pine Tree Chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society.

Our website can be found [here](#).

[Visit us on Facebook](#) 

Or contact Dwight Burkard at jburkard@megalink.net for more information or with your feedback.

Editor pro tem: Dwight Burkard



The Marr & Colton console
(Dwight Burkard photo)