



Elbert La Chelle at the "new" Wurlitzer console at the Castro Theatre, where he is now playing regularly.

After the war and his discharge, he returned to his old job at KFRC. About the same time he went to work for John Rickey, owner of some of San Francisco's better restaurants. He played an electronic organ at the Town House and at the Red Chimney. A few years later KFRC discontinued the use of the organ and sold it to a church. Elbert then played the organ in a dance band at Sweet's Ballroom in Oakland for a while before he went into semi-retirement. He played electronic organs on passenger liners such as the SS Santa Mercedes and Santa Magdalena. He lived in Hawaii part of the time each year and maintained an apartment there. In Honolulu, where he has many friends, he was a member of the Honolulu Organ Club and has given concerts there.

In 1976 Elbert became a staff organist at the Castro Theatre in San Francisco, playing a three-manual Conn nightly for intermissions between the regular features. In 1982 he began playing the four-manual Wurlitzer pipe organ which replaced the Conn at the Castro and his career had thus come full circle. A plaque in the lobby of the Castro says: "The Castro Theatre presents Elbert La Chelle. A movie palace organist extraordinaire, Elbert La Chelle is nationally celebrated for his virtuoso technique and extensive repertoire including original compositions. A veteran of fabled theatre palaces as well as his own coast to coast radio program, La Chelle recreates nightly the excitement of the golden age of movie going." □

Reflections

ATOS '82

by Harold Bellamy

The 1982 ATOS annual convention is now history and after a respite of only a few days, we went back to our normal busy mode.

We have, however, reflected on our performance and believe that, overall, we put on a successful convention. This consensus is substantiated by the many favorable comments, verbal and written, which have been made by the attending delegates. Several quarters of the theatre organ world have suggested that we recount our convention experience, both for our mutual interest and to perhaps benefit future conventions. The following, therefore, is a description of how we organized and planned, along with some observations relating to our performance.

Achieving the prime goal for the convention — that of getting together as ATOS members to enjoy theatre organ music — was extremely satisfying. The fine performances of the many artists, a great brunch/annual meeting, the conviviality at the banquet-dinner dance, and the moonlight river cruise all spoke to this achievement.

We are also very aware of the fact that mistakes were made. Although hopeful to the contrary, we were certain that Murphy's Law would prevail sooner or later. We intend to convey to San Francisco our advice for minimizing mishaps, but we do so with the knowledge that Murphy's Law does not confine itself to Michigan. Generally, we believe that our planning was successful. Similarly, we believe that we also were well organized.

The planning process was lengthy, starting over two years prior to the convention when we attempted to obtain a confirmation of our designation as the official host of the ATOS '82 Convention from the national office. Of concern was the fact that our

chairpersons, Marge Muethel and Jim Boutell, were faced with the necessity of tying down a hotel and convention dates. Unfortunately, the national office in 1980 was undergoing a measure of disorder, a situation which did not enhance prompt communications. There were also references to convention guidelines which never did materialize.

Unable to wait, the Motor City board instructed Marge and Jim to proceed without official sanction. After securing hotel and convention dates, they entered into the negotiations phase for room rates, facilities, food and the establishment of ground rules for both the hotel and Motor City. This task became complicated with several changes in hotel management and the hard realities of rising costs. Next they moved on to the organizational structure and program format. For structure they decided on eight working committees: registration, hospitality, transportation, food, publicity, security, concert artist hosting and convention store. The program format would be developed by a series of convention committee work sessions. Although somewhat apparent, the following is a brief description of these committees, assignments and some observations regarding their intrinsic qualities.

Registration: The assignment — check in the delegates and give them their convention information and schedule packets. Sounds simple enough, doesn't it? Not so. The committee had to set up a check-in system, work with the Tourist Bureau, tabulate reservations, collate delegate activity choices and coordinate incoming revenues and registration lists with our treasurer. As a result, this function ran so smoothly it did appear to many as a simple task.

Hospitality: This committee's job

was to welcome the delegates and to look after their needs. This fun group also became noted for their serious moments. For example, one evening they were observed cutting out paper dolls and busses. Shortly thereafter, they were seen positioning the cut-outs to illustrate and plot out their hosting strategies. Many ATOS members expressed their appreciation for the warmth extended by this well-organized group.

Transportation: As we are aware, the key element of any ATOS convention is that of hearing a lot of theatre organ. In order to achieve that objective, the chore was to see to it that everyone would be transported from one concert location to another. No small task! A color dot system affixed to the convention badge was devised to sort people destined for separate locations, a necessity because of limited capacities of homes and pizza parlors. Despite some minor mishaps, we moved 685 people the entire week without losing anyone in the process. However, there were several instances where busses were ready to leave only to find it necessary to retrieve lingering delegates from the far recesses of organ chambers.

Food: This assignment was straightforward. See to it that all the food portions included in the convention registration fees were arranged for and delivered. The occasions came in the form of a brunch and a dinner banquet at the Westin Hotel, a box lunch picnic at Belle Isle Park, a dinner at the Meadowbrook Hall afterglow and a lunch at the Calvary Baptist Church. The group's experiences can be well anticipated and realized — bouts with chefs, cost negotiations, selection differences and, finally, the likes and dislikes of the consumer. The aim? Satisfy the majority and at least you're on the winning side!

Publicity: The job here is to get the word and graphics out to you in advance. This committee's work is perhaps what urged you to make up your mind to come to ATOS '82. In addition, they had to publicize shows that were open to the public. Their most visible product was the convention program, and we believe it was well designed and tastefully presented.

Security: Sounds ominous and foreboding, doesn't it? Have no worry, this committee's concern was that of seeing to it that only registered conventioners boarded busses and

attended concerts. They did their job so inconspicuously that I'm sure no one was aware of the activity.


Concert Artist Hosting: This committee is one which had a constant identity problem. The task was to see to it that concert artists were transported to the organ for practice and/or concert. Are these people classified as hosts, sitters, attendants, serfs or squires? Whatever, it was an enjoyable and necessary task.

Convention Store: We didn't want you to go home without some remembrance of ATOS '82! This committee set up what some called the "company store" stocked with theatre organ-related items, e.g., jewelry, badges, belt buckles, music, books and, of course, records. The biggest surprise to this committee was the unexpected high volume of sales activity, especially in records and convention tapes. Actually, the tape sales extended throughout the summer and are just now simmering down.


These then were the primary functional committees that had to be coordinated. However, there were several other work assignments which were not formally organized as convention committees, but nonetheless constituted an additional manpower demand. The big Fox show for example, a major event presenting for the first time a rare silent film *Robin Hood*, also had to be organized. A small band of ATOS members wearing

their Downtown Theatre Enthusiasts (DTE) hats saw to it that the huge Wurlitzer and staging facilities were in working order, in addition to the many other tasks required for such a show. The needs of the organ and the 36-piece orchestra were formidable. It was necessary that they operate as DTE members because the nature and scale of the show dictated that it be a "piggy-backed" event — not officially sponsored by ATOS. Motor City and DTE did, however, share in the cost of making the presentation. It was a large undertaking, the cost of which exceeded \$20,000. We are happy to report that we missed breaking even by only \$1,500, despite our publicity effort and the help of local radio and TV people who tried to promote the Fox effort. We would not recommend a similar venture without a great deal of forethought. What is involved could very well be the subject of another article. I am sure Greg Bellamy would be very happy to counsel anyone who is interested in such an endeavor.

The Bob-Lo moonlight cruise also required a lot of preparation. Although we as a chapter do the trip annually, the cost of the boat's operation has been such that arrangements are becoming increasingly difficult to negotiate. Since it was thoroughly enjoyed during the 1974 ATOS convention, we decided to include it again despite the problems involved.



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Another work effort that must be acknowledged is that of the Redford Theatre's restoration. Because it is our home, several members were determined to accelerate the pace of work in order to better show the character of the restoration effort, with more than a hint of its original state, particularly in the inner lobby area. The restoration is under the direction of Donnie Martin. His parents, Enid and Marty, were also eager to accomplish this objective and worked with several other members at this increased day/night pace for six weeks prior to the convention. Enid, by the way, is also our treasurer and she managed to keep up her accounting tasks as well. If you met that charming gal at the convention, I doubt that you could imagine her climbing up and around the high scaffolding to reach the high walls in order to apply the multi-blended applications of paint required to achieve the original effect.

Another manpower event — the green vest brigade! Those attending the convention will recall that we decided to identify the convention workers (all of whom were also fully-paid registrants) by having them wear green vests. We had over 100 active workers of the type which required that they be identified (bus captains, hosts, store workers, etc.). Bolts of green material were purchased and the outer lobby of the Redford Theatre was outfitted with sewing machines. Passing neighborhood pedestrians are used to seeing the outer lobby filled at night when we have our mailing parties, but they took double-takes at the sight of what appeared to be a sewing sweat shop.

At this juncture, a point must be made. Although volunteer worker assignments have been described here, the attitude of the committee was one of fun rather than of work. We were so eager to have a good Detroit party that we planned a somewhat long convention. Many admitted that while it was lengthy, they were enjoying it despite the onset of fatigue.

In a more serious vane, we would be derelict if we did not advise you of some of the issues which surfaced during our post-convention critique session. Marge Muethel chaired the meeting which, in effect, could more accurately be termed as "Monday morning quarterback session."

After acknowledging all of the outside praise we had received, Marge requested that we sift through the convention activities to identify problem areas and suggest solutions or changes in procedures. The purpose of this review was to provide ourselves and any other chapters information that would maximize convention success. Much to our pleasure, the review, despite the candid attitude of the group, revealed only a few problem areas.

It was noted that we did have instances wherein our transportation did not meet our proposed schedules. It was determined that these problems could be resolved by establishing a communication link between the transportation chairman and a designated person at each concert location.

It was also noted that where food was to be served long lines developed as the busses unloaded, requiring equally long waits. It was concluded that this situation could be improved in two ways: First, by selling or distributing tickets on the bus enroute rather than at the dining establishment and, second, it was recommended that the management of food establishments be encouraged to place as much of the food as possible on the tables in advance of arrival rather than utilizing a serving line.

Also on the topic of busses, there were mixed opinions regarding the effects of not having air-conditioned busses on all trips. In our contracts, we did not mandate air-conditioned busses because of the much higher cost involved. Our transportation costs exceeded \$30,000 and amounted to about one-half of the registration. By taking the busses on an availability basis, there was a considerable saving and we tried very hard to keep the cost down. If the bus requirement was of modest size (four to eight busses), requiring air conditioning would have been more viable. However, with a requirement of up to 14 busses at one time, we were caught in a cost and availability bind. Availability became a problem because the public systems would not guarantee busses during hours when scheduled service runs were required.

The review also included an analysis of the effect of registration required of all volunteer workers. The nature of many assignments precluded the full participation of many workers. How to define and/or dif-

ferentiate the degree or level of participation in setting their registration costs is indeed a vexing problem. The review session, however, disclosed that several worker-members, both registered and not registered, were not equitably treated. It was concluded that while solutions do not appear readily discernable, much more thought and attention should be given to this problem whenever another convention is undertaken.

Generally cooperating with our convention was the weather. Although somewhat warm and humid at times, the sun shown brightly and it was indeed a weather winner until the very last day at the "Afterglow" when the rains came. The Afterglow trip was to Meadowbrook Hall, a very elegant, beautiful mansion in suburban Detroit. Actually, to say "when the rains came" is somewhat inaccurate. In Michigan (even in July) when that cool Canadian air collides with the hotter air moving up from the south, the results may be spectacular. Since the weather was so favorable, it was decided that the dinner would be served on the terrace under a large canopy. Fortunately, the main courses were completed before a torrential wind and rain storm struck, forcing some to forget their desserts and run for shelter. Others stayed to help hold down the canopy. However, like the few other brief encounters of the wrong kind, everyone took it in good stride.

The banquet and brunch sessions were both well received and enjoyed as a relaxing respite to the high level of activity programmed. Most conceded, however, that the brunch/annual meeting event was the real winner! The rapport between the national board and the membership was and will be hard to match. It was obvious that President Lois Segur and her board achieved a very harmonious bond with the membership. This we did not plan — it simply happened!

We sincerely hope this description of how we organized, planned and carried out ATOS '82 is of interest to those who attended, as well as to those who didn't. Despite some of the shortfalls which occurred, some sentiments to repeat are already surfacing. Most of us, however, are content to wait a little longer, preferring to give a more immediate priority to looking forward to the next adventure in San Francisco. See you there, y'hear! □