

The Municipal Organ of Portland, Maine

by Lloyd E. Klos

The 4/97 Austin, known as the Kotschmar Memorial Organ, in Portland, Maine, was the first municipal organ in America; it has been used almost continuously since its dedication in 1912. Such instruments were rather common in large cities throughout the country earlier in the century, but few remain and are in use today. The organ is the focal point of City Hall Auditorium, and has played a major part in the musical life of the city.

The Kotschmar was the gift of Cyrus H.K. Curtis, a native son, who founded the Curtis Publishing Company in Philadelphia. The company was known for such magazines as *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The Ladies Home Journal*.

Like his father Cyrus L., Curtis loved music and always had a pipe organ in his home. He and his father admired organist composer Hermann Kotschmar, a German immigrant, who had been persuaded by the elder Curtis to move from Boston to Portland in 1849. Because of his admiration for the musician, Cyrus L. added "Kotschmar" to his son's name when the boy was eight years old.

Kotschmar was little known outside of New England, but was well known in Maine. His first job in Portland was conducting the orchestra in the Union Street Theatre. His talents were wasted there, and in 1850 he performed his first organ recital for Portland's Sacred Music Society. Then he was appointed organist at the First Parish Church, a position he held for 50 years. As a composer he is best remembered for his "Te Duem in F." The original manuscript and his baton are in a glass case below the memorial plaque on the rear wall of the auditorium stage; above the plaque is a bust of Kotschmar.

The Austin Organ Company was given the task of building and installing the Kotschmar organ. It was the donor's wish that it would become one of the world's great instruments. In reality, the instrument is eight organs in one — Great, Swell, Orchestral, Solo, Antiphonal, Echo, Percussion, and Pedal, all controlled from a four-manual console. The instrument, except for the Antiphonal and Echo organs which are located above the rear of the auditorium, is installed across the entire width of the auditorium stage. There are over 6000 speaking pipes; the 195 pipes visible to the audience are non-speaking display pipes. The organ includes a number of percussions: Chimes, Snare Drum, Bass Drum, Turkish Cymbal, Crash Cymbal, Xylophone, Marimba, Glockenspiel, Bell, and Carillon. The organ uses a 30-horsepower blower.



Former Municipal Organist Douglas Rafter seated at the new Kotschmar console.

The installation used the Austin Universal Wind Chest System, which was considered a wide departure from the norm. The wind chests are huge rooms to which access is gained through double air-tight doors. The main chest is 53 feet long, 15 feet wide, and eight feet high; on the floor above are five swell chambers 16 feet high in which the pipes are located.

Upon the organ's dedication on August 22, 1912, a Music Commission was established, with the power to appoint the Municipal Organist. They engaged Will C. Macfarlane, a founder of the American Guild of Organists and organ-

ist of St. Thomas' Church, New York City, who served from 1912 to 1919. He set high standards of musicianship and did much to popularize organ music. He invited world-renowned musicians such as pianist Josef Hofmann, violinist Mischa Elman, and Organist Marcel Dupré to perform in the auditorium. Macfarlane was followed by Dr. Irving Morgan, who served from 1919 to 1921. Then Edwin H. Lemare was lured from his municipal post in San Francisco with an offer of an annual salary of \$12,000, a figure never equaled since. He served from 1921 to 1923 and was followed by Charles R. Cronham from 1924 to 1932.



View of the stage and organ as it was originally. The console is the original also.

This was a period of high prestige for the organ, and programs in the auditorium were centered on it. There were concerts every afternoon and they were well received. Sunday and evening concerts featured such artists as Dupré and E. Power Biggs. Performing the complete organ works of Bach, they attracted audiences as large as 2400 persons. In a single season, more than 50,000 were entertained.

Dr. Macfarlane returned for the 1933-1934 season, after which the Music Commission was discontinued and the Municipal Organ Department placed under the jurisdiction of the City Manager. Alfred Brinkler was appointed organist at that time. He maintained a seven-week series of 28 concerts each summer, and a short series of programs during the winter months, engaging many noted guest organists to play. Brinkler held the post until 1952, when John E. Fay took over. In 1976, Douglas Rafter was named Municipal Organist. He served until 1981, at which time Gerald McGee was named to the post. McGee is also organist of St. Luke's Cathedral in Portland.

In 1927, the organ was enlarged, thanks to Curtis, and a new movable console installed, which, with 75 feet of cable, could be placed anywhere on the stage. In 1968, Mary Louise Zimbalist, daughter of Cyrus H.K. Curtis, donated \$44,000 for renovation of the organ. City Hall Auditorium was expanded to better accommodate the organ as well as the Portland Symphony Orchestra. The organ was moved rearward 18 feet, and the Austin Company refurbished the instrument. At this time, an independent Pedal rank, the 16'-32' Magnaton, was removed. A few years later, vandals damaged the 32' Bombard pipes. They were not restored until 1975 when John Weaver, a frequent guest organist, encouraged the public to pressure the City Council to provide the necessary funds.

Free concerts have been given on the Kotschmar since its dedication in 1912. Currently, there is a summer series featuring guest organists during the last three weeks of July and the first three weeks of August. The annual Christmas concert is a Maine tradition, bringing people from distant points. The repertoire is unlimited. John Weaver, director

of the organ department at the Curtis Institute of Music (founded by Cyrus H. H. Curtis in Philadelphia), features classical organ literature; Lee Erwin, known throughout the theatre organ world, entertains with Beatles' songs and Joplin Rags. Others offer choral works.

Two men were responsible for the resurgence of the Kotschmar organ:

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Douglas Rafter and the former Maintenance Chief, Burton Witham. Rafter was just a boy when his father brought him to a concert by the then Municipal Organist, Charles Cronham. "I caught organ fever," he says, "and the sight of that wall-to-wall instrument overwhelmed me. I was determined to play it one day."

The day arrived in 1936, after the 21-year-old had become the youngest New Englander to pass the degree examination of the American Guild of Organists. On the threshold of a long career as church organist, teacher and recitalist, he responded to an invitation from Alfred Brinkler, City Organist, to give a recital on the Kotzschmar.

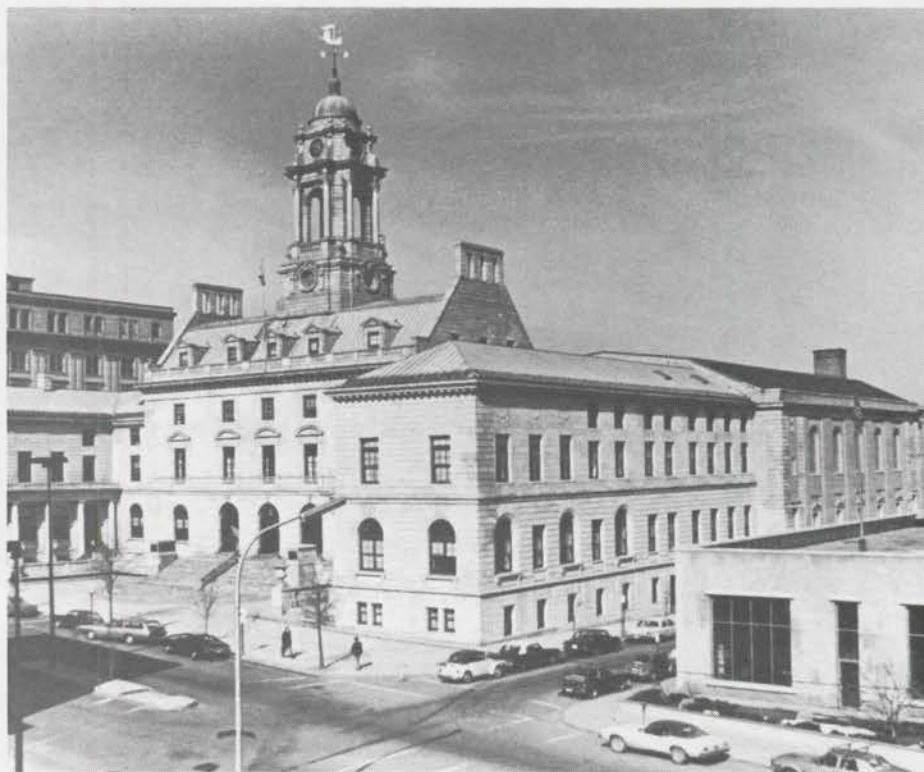
Every summer, he made a pilgrimage to Portland for a concert. In 1971, Rafter and his wife moved to Maine, where he became a church musician and teacher of organ at the University of Southern Maine.

"It's like
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He felt like the captain of the "Queen Mary" whenever he played the Kotzschmar. "It's like being a scientist in a well-equipped laboratory. You have everything to work with and are not hard put to improvise with a few basic tools, as in the case of so many church organs." Rafter is quite versatile, being equally at home with classical organ literature, orchestral and operatic transcriptions, and popular music. He has played at least one concert on the organ each year since 1936.

Burton Witham said, "I came to the opening concert with my parents and was enchanted by it. My father wanted me to be an organist, but I neglected practice." Upon his graduation from Westbrook Seminary, he went to the Faust School of Tuning in Boston and then started his own business in Gorham, Maine.

The organist, Rafter, and the mechanic, Witham, made a perfect team; each respected the talents of the other. Because of their love for the instrument, they served Portland with a degree of dedication rarely seen in civil servants. Rafter served as administrator as well as organist, and was responsible only to the City Manager.



The City Hall in Portland, Maine, the Municipal organ is located in the building with the chimney at the right rear.

Largely through the efforts of the "Friends" organizers, Peter S. Plumb and Dr. Malcolm W. Cass, and those of David E. Wallace and Gerald F. McGee, currently Organ Curator and Municipal Organist, respectively, about two-thirds of the necessary work was completed by the end of 1985. The goal, of course, is to hear the organ played to its full capabilities. David Wallace has been supervising volunteers from the Portland Chapter of the American Guild of Organists in washing dust and grime from the pipes. The "Friends" are now financially responsible for the operation and maintenance of the organ.

Witham, who began his tenure in 1938, bemoaned the sporadic financial support for the instrument. A \$1000 annual appropriation was made by the City Council, and it had to be spent by the end of the fiscal year. Witham said in 1979, "I cannot convince them of the wisdom of appropriating enough funds for major repairs." Witham's annual salary was only \$1400. "You might say it's a labor of love."

The fact that the organ was operable was deceiving. It was alive but far from well. The 25 to 30 years of neglect had taken their toll. In 1981, however, "The Friends of the Kotzschmar Organ" was formed for the express purpose of raising funds to completely rehabilitate the instrument.

The most unusual experience? "It came during a Lee Erwin concert," says Alan Kellogg, Business Manager of the Organ Department. "When firemen carrying axes poured into the lobby, I was very glad to have been there, instead of backstage. I halted their entry into the auditorium long enough to go on stage, stop Lee, and ask everyone to step outside while firemen checked out the building. To prevent panic, I never mentioned that a bomb threat had been received. After the building was thoroughly checked, we re-assembled and the concert was completed. It was a 'first' for us, and certainly a 'first' for Lee Erwin."

ATOS members, when in the vicinity, are urged to drop in at City Hall Auditorium in Portland. If they're lucky, they will hear the Kotzschmar Memorial Organ being played.

Tax-free donations may be made to The Friends of the Kotzschmar Organ, Inc., 30 Myrtle Street, Portland, Maine 04101.

Information and photographs for this article were furnished by Douglas Rafter, Gerald McGee, Alan Kellogg and Dorothy Bromage.



The stage and organ as it is today, with the new console.

See next page for
Kotzschmar Memorial Organ
Specifications.

“There’s only
two ways to
sum up music:
either it’s good
or it’s bad.
If it’s good
you don’t
mess about it,
you
just enjoy it.”

Louis Armstrong

Opening of Nominations for 1988 Election of Directors

**NOTE:
DEADLINE IS
FEBRUARY 1, 1988**

It is time to nominate candidates for the National ATOS Board of Directors for the three-year term from July 1988 through June 1991. All regular ATOS members are eligible for nomination and may nominate themselves or be nominated by other members, in which case written consent of the nominee is mandatory and must be received before the nominee’s name can be placed on the ballot.

A nominee need have no special talent or experience in pipe organ technology or musicianship; however, nominees should have a demonstrated interest in ATOS and the time to work toward the goals and the growth of the society. While there are certain benefits enjoyed by directors, one of which is the reimbursement of certain meeting-related expenses, there are also responsibilities. Along with a willingness to participate in the administrative affairs of the society, it is most important that Board members faithfully attend both Board and Committee meetings.

The Board usually meets only once a year during Convention, so attendance of all Directors is necessary if the decisions and actions of the Board are to be truly responsive to the membership. In addition, Directors serve on one or more committees providing valuable input to the Board. The chairmen of these committees are responsible for submitting a written report of their activities and recommendations prior to the annual meeting of the Board.

Procedure to be observed in the nomination process is as follows:

1. Each nominee shall furnish a small black and white photo, together with a statement, **not to exceed 100 words**, including personal data, work and theatre organ experience, and a short platform statement.
2. All candidates must have their resumes and photos mailed to the ATOS Secretary, 423 North Stafford Avenue, Richmond, Virginia 23220, **no later than February 1, 1988.**
3. Your ballot and the resumes of candidates will be included in the March/April THEATRE ORGAN. By voting for the candidates of your choice, you are demonstrating your interest in and support of ATOS objectives.

If you have any questions, write or call Allen Miller, Chairman, Nominating Committee, 167 Carriage Drive, Glastonbury, Connecticut 06033, or phone 203/633-5710.

Specification

KOTZSCHMAR MEMORIAL ORGAN

Austin Organ Company, 1912 / 1927 / 1968

GREAT (Unenclosed)	ORCHESTRAL (enclosed)	ANTIPHONAL (auditorium ceiling)	SWELL (enclosed)
32' Sub Bourdon	16' Contra Viola	8' Diapason	16' Quintaton
16' Bourdon	8' Geigen Principal	8' Grossflöte	8' Diapason Phoron
16' Violone Dolce	8' Concert Flute	8' Harmonic Flute	8' Horn Diapason
8' First Open Diapason	8' Flute Celeste	8' String Celeste - 5 ranks	8' Violoncello
8' Second Open Diapason	8' Dulciana	8' String Celeste - 2 ranks	8' Viola da Gamba
8' Third Open Diapason	8' Viole d'Orchestre	8' String Celeste - 2 ranks	8' Viole Celeste - 3 ranks
8' Major Flute	8' Viole Celeste	8' String Celeste - 2 ranks	8' Muted Viol
8' Bourdon	8' Voix Seraphique	8' Viol from 5 ranks	8' Unda Maris
4' Octave	8' Quintadena	4' Spitzflöte	8' Flauto Dolce
2 ² / ₃ ' Twelfth	4' Flute d'Amore	4' Principal	8' Stopped Flute
2' Fifteenth	4' Dulcet	8' French Trumpet	8' Chimney Flute
	2' Flageolet	String Mixture - 3 ranks	4' Orchestral Flute
(enclosed)	8' French Horn	Tremolo	4' Harmonic Flute
8' Violoncello	8' Clarinet	3 Comb. pistons	4' Salicet
8' Gemshorn	8' English Horn	PEDAL	4' Principal
8' Clarabella	8' Harp	32' Contra Bourdon (Gt)	2 ² / ₃ ' Nazard
8' Doppelflöte	4' Celesta (from Harp)	16' Open Diapason (Gt)	2' Flautino
4' Holhflöte	Chimes	16' Violone (Gt)	1-3/5' Tierce
16' Double Trumpet	Snare Drum	16' First Bourdon (Gt)	1-1/7' Septieme
8' Trumpet	Turkish Cymbal	16' Dulciana (Gt)	1' Twenty-second
4' Clarion	Fan Tremolo	16' Contra Viola (Orch)	Dolce Cornet - 3 ranks
8' Harp	Antiphonal organ	16' Second Bourdon (from 32')	16' Contra Fagotto
4' Celesta (from Harp)	Orch/Orch 16, 4	8' Octave Bourdon	8' Cornopean
Chimes (from Solo)	Sw/Orch 16, 8, 4	(from 1st Bour.)	8' Corno d'Amore
Snare Drum	So & Ec/Orch 16, 8, 4	8' Octave Flute (Gt)	8' Oboe
Turkish Cymbal	8 Comb. pistons	8' Violoncello Celeste (So)	8' Orchestral Oboe
		10 ² / ₃ ' Quint (Gt)	8' Vox Humana
Sw/Gt 16, 8, 4		4' Super Octave Flute (So)	Valve Tremolo
Orch/Gt 16, 8, 4		32' Contra Bombarde	Fan Tremolo
So & Ec/Gt 8, 4		16' Bombarde (from 32')	
GT/Gt 4		16' Tuba Profunda (So)	Sw/SW 16, 4
8 Comb. pistons		8' Harmonic Tuba (So)	So/SW 8
		4' Tuba Clarion (So)	10 Comb. pistons
		16' Contra Fagotto (Sw)	
		Bass Drum	SOLO
		Crash Cymbal	(enclosed)
		Bell	16' Violone (GT)
		Gt/Ped 8, 5 ¹ / ₃	8' Major Flute (Gt)
		Sw/Ped 8, 4	8' Grand Diapason
		Orch/Ped 8, 4	8' Gamba
		So & Ec/Ped 8, 4	8' Gamba Celeste
		Ped/Ped 8	4' Flute Ouverte
		3 Comb. pedals	2' Concert Piccolo
			16' Tuba Profunda)
			8' Harmonic Tuba) 1 rank
			4' Tuba Clarion)
			8' Musette
			8' Tuba Magna
			8' Marimba
			4' Xylophone
			4' Glockenspiel
			Chimes
			Fan Tremolo
			Antiphonal organ
			So & Ec/So 16, 4
			Gt/So 8
			5 Comb. pistons
ECHO (auditorium ceiling)	WIND PRESSURES		
8' Nachthorn	Great	10"	
8' Gedeckt	Swell	10"	
8' Viole Celeste - 3 ranks	Orchestral	10"	
8' Vox Aetheria	Solo	15"	
8' Vox Angelica	Tuba Magna	25"	
4' Fernflöte	Contra Bombarde	25"	
8' Vox Humana	Bombarde	25"	
Carillon	Antiphonal		
Tremolo	Antiphonal	7"	
	Echo	5"	
2 Comb. pistons			