

DATE	MORNING	AFTERNOON	EVENING
<b>SUN.</b> 16th	<b>Middlesex Day</b> Registration 9 AM - 11 AM Buses leave 12 noon	HARROW GRANADA Concert 1:30 - 3:30 Wurlitzer D.1.Y. Meals	HARROW SCHOOL & TOUR OF LONDON. Concert 6-7:30 PM
<b>MON.</b> 17th	<b>Buckingham. Shire</b> AYLESBURY TOWN HALL Concert 11 - 12:15 Hybrid Arrange Buffet Lunch	STEVENAGE Concert 3-5 PM Christie Refreshments available	ST. ALBANS MUSEUM Concert 7-9 PM Rutt. Wurlitzer
<b>TUES.</b> 18th	<b>Sussex Day</b> GRANADA WALTHAMSTOW Concert 11 - 12:15 Christie Refreshments available	PORTSLADE TOWN HALL Concert 3:30 - 4:50 PM Compton D.1.Y. Meals	DOME BRIGHTON Concert Christie
<b>WED.</b> 19th	<b>London Day City</b> GAUMONT STATE KILBURN Concert 10:30 - 12 Noon Wurlitzer Refreshments	NEW GALLERY, REGENT ST. Silent Film 2:30 - 4:30 Wurlitzer	HOME TOURS Chorleywood. Piano Museum Plough, Wurlitzer Lodge Maybe preview BorehamWood
<b>THURS.</b> 20th	<b>Berkshire Day</b> ABINGDON ABBEY HALL Concert 11 - 12:15 Compton	BLenheim PALACE TOUR Organ Interlude	OLD WINDSOR MEMORIAL HALL Compton Arrange Dinner
<b>FRI.</b> 21st	<b>Heritage Day</b> ROYAL ALBERT HALL (Heritage)	HAMPTON COURT Chapel	D.1.Y. Free Evening
<b>SAT.</b> 22nd	<b>South Wales W/E</b> Leave for BARRY (Overnight Stop) 9:00 AM	BRISTOL CATHEDRAL 12-1 Surprise	BARRY MEMORIAL HALL Dinner & Dance Chapter Christie Organ
<b>SUN.</b> 23rd	CARDIFF CASTLE: WAVERLEY CRUISE or D.1.Y.	BARRY MEMORIAL HALL Concert LUNCH AT ONE O'CLOCK	Home to London Leave 6 PM

GRANADA TOOTING WILL BE INCLUDED IN ITINERARY.  
TIMINGS ARE APPROXIMATE. EXTRA VENUES MAY BE PLANNED.

Information. Telephone: 01-422-1538. Price includes overnight hotel at Barry.

Please remit in English Currency.

# INTERVIEW

Banquet attendees at the 1988 ATOS Convention were entertained by Dennis Hedberg and George Wright in dialogue about the world of the theatre organ and its music. A friendship between these two has existed since the early 1960s, and their dedication to the Philosophy of Excellence was evident in the remarks exchanged between them that night. We would like to thank George Wright for allowing us to share this interview with our readers. Thanks, also, to Randy Rock for providing the tape recording. Ed.



## GEORGE WRIGHT

*Hedberg:* Some of the things I want to probe here might be a little provocative for some people out there, but in keeping with the theme of this convention, I'm trying to stir the pot a little bit. I'm trying to...

*Wright:* Intentionally be provocative?

*Hedberg:* Not to the point to degrade or be nasty about anyone or anything, but it seem to me that there are a lot of what I call "myths" that are being perpetuated by many people in ATOS concerning how well did people play in years back — and how well did the organs themselves actually play. I realize, George, that you are not old enough to — not to have been of the early silent era, but still close enough to it to see what was happening. And we hear that every little town had its Bijou Theatre and had a Wurlitzer, a Robert-Morton, or a Moller or Kimball or whatever. Were all of those instruments really that well-played?

*Wright:* No. So our friends here will get a more exact picture of where I fit in that time period — I don't — I was born in 1920 and I'll be 68 next month. And so I came along either too early or too late. I started playing the organ at a time when there were no organs to play — and no jobs. It was the depth of the Depression. I was, however, observing this musical scene — the organ scene — from an early age and, in retrospect, found that I was very astute, and I was gifted by being able to separate some of the wheat from the chaff. A valid and large part of my

musical education was gleaned from radio, and in the earlier days of radio there were more unsponsored periods of broadcasting than there were sponsored. And, of course, a good way for little stations in little towns to fill a lot of time was to have Miss Johnson go over to the First Baptist Church and play the organ. And she would sit there for two or three hours and play everything she knew and some things she didn't know. And when she was finished the guy would say, "Well, that brings us to the end of today's organ recital." I recall hearing some wonderful, beautiful music being played beautifully on organs that sounded wonderful. And I was also able to get so many little stations up and down the dial that were broadcasting these little "pip-squeak" organs with totally ungifted, untalented hacks playing them that the good became notable by comparison to the really bad. And there were some very, very bad players. I think that, at one point, anyone who could play diddle-diddle-da on the piano was delegated to come in and play for the matinee at the local showhouse on the three-rank something-or other.

I'm wandering on about this, but have I answered that question? I think there were both very good and very bad things going on in the theatres and on the radio.

*Hedberg:* Well, what do you think we are doing with it today? Do you think that the kinds of programs that ATOS presents show the good or the bad compared to the performances of years back?

*Wright:* This is a question that is difficult for me to answer, because I may not endeavor myself to certain segments of the population. I meant to say before this dialogue between us started that everything that I am going to say must be prefaced by the phrase, *in my opinion*. Okay? In my opinion, I have very mixed emotions about what the ATOS is doing. I think some of it is excellent, and I think some of it is kind of mediocre — ineffectual. I realize that there are small chapters that do not have any budget and may be off the beaten path and so on and so on. I just feel that, perhaps, there are a few too many concerts being played on a few too many organs that aren't really up to exposure to the general public, and I feel that some of the people who play are not as good as some of the others. I agree that there is a high degree of professionalism with some of the players and they do an excellent job, but it is a mixed bag — and of necessity it must be. Some people like Gershwin — others like Cole Porter. Some like marches — other like Strauss waltzes, and it is difficult to take the shotgun approach and have a little something that everyone will like.

Have I gracefully skirted that question? It's really a loaded one. I want to be honest. I think some of it is just excellent and I think some of it is quite mediocre. How could I be more outspoken?

*Hedberg:* Well, we've all heard some turkeys, and we've all heard some great stuff, too. I believe — in my opinion —

that the music you make is of an outstanding nature. It is, in fact, so outstanding that there is hardly a theatre organist in the country, who is 40-45 years old and younger, who has not emulated, or tried to use, some of the things that you do. Do you find this a form of flattery or do you think, "Why do people steal my stuff all the time? Why can't they do something for themselves?"

*Wright:* I have mixed emotions about that. Sometimes it bothers me, and other times I couldn't care less. I am going to say something that sounds terribly egotistical, but I don't mean it to be that way. I'm weird. I'm different. I'm me. (*Hedberg:* That's for sure — there's you, and then the mold broke.) And I have been influenced in my youth by older players and better players. My playing is a polyglot. It's an eclectic collection of influences and flavors and tastes put together. I mentioned listening to the radio so much when I was a kid, and this went on from the middle twenties until the early 1940s. I know that some of you may not agree with the abilities and taste of the artists that I'm going to mention, but you don't know — and I do know — and that makes a difference. I was really strongly influenced by a number of players whose personalities, both personally and musically, couldn't have varied more. And I'm speaking of people like Edna Sellers and Herbert Foote and Larry Larsen, who broadcast from Chicago, and, of course, Jesse Crawford, who later on broadcast from Chicago. And then there was Eddie Dunstedter when he moved from Minneapolis to St. Louis and played on this wonderful-sounding Kilgen organ. Herbert Foote, in Chicago, played at the Marine Dining Room at the Edgewater Beach Hotel on coast-to-coast CBS, and it was a little, dinky Moller — I think about five ranks — and it had one tremulant on it that went wa-wa-wa-wa-wa-wa, but it sounded very over-sexed and romantic and lovely and wonderful. Foote played it so beautifully, and he played such a variety of things — dumb little trivia, pop tunes of the day, selections from operettas — and he made it sound glorious! Now, this wasn't just a kid's idea of it — by then I had become a connoisseur of what sounded good and what didn't. Another Chicago artist who was heard all over the dial on a very small three-manual Wurlitzer organ from WBBM was Milton Charles. I was also influenced very strongly by Ann Leaf, and, of course, by Jesse Crawford.

So, a little thrill ran through me tonight when I heard that there is a Jesse Crawford chapter of ATOS. I think that is just wonderful, because that man's art is sometimes denied, and it is all but forgotten. And the younger people who condescend, maybe, to listen to Jesse

Crawford recordings are, perhaps, listening to some of his very poor output. I'm speaking specifically of things that he recorded on the Simonton organ in Los Angeles and on the Lorin Whitney organ in California. Those organs weren't him — they weren't his type of organ — he didn't like them. He was pressured into recording — flattered into it. He was told, "Oh, come on, you're the king. You are the greatest!" When Jesse said, "But I can't do what I want to do," they said, "Oh, come on, you can sit down and play a reed organ and everybody would love you." Not true! Consequently, I talk to younger people about the heart of Jesse Crawford and they say, "Oh, I don't like Jesse Crawford at all." And it turns out, most of the time, that they haven't heard the real art of Crawford as demonstrated by him on the old Victor 78 records. Not all of those were great, but there are gems among them that are little works of art where that man poured his soul out — his heart was on his sleeve — and he sat there and emoted and put this genuine, wonderful, fervent feeling into his playing. I could make you a list of what, in my opinion, separates the Crawford wheat from the Crawford chaff. And if young, aspiring professionals could only be exposed to this in its true form, they'd say, "Why, this is a revelation! I have never heard such expressive, poetic playing, such clean playing, such phrasing, such meaningful translation of the lyrics of the song to the tones of the organ."

Have I gotten way off in left field again? Those of you who know me know that I always say what I think, and it is not with the intent of hurting anyone, because I'm a lover and not a fighter by heart. And I feel that when I am asked a direct question, particularly about my love, my art, my music, all of which are inseparable, that I have to be honest. I have been willingly cast in the role of a coach and a teacher and have given seminars, and that is a great responsibility because it behooves me to pass on, to those who want to learn, the truth. And the truth can only be what I feel in my heart.

*Hedberg:* George, there are so many people who learn from what you do — you've probably influenced people more than any other living organist, and yet, when you hear someone else play something that sounds like something of your own, you have been heard to say, "Boring." Are you saying this because it's boring to you because you do it and you hear somebody else do it?

*Wright:* God, I think, I did that ten years ago, and so then I sit my buns down on the bench and think I'll do something different. But I'm not going to do that anymore. It's become a cliché. I must call to

your attention a question that was asked at a recent seminar by a really sweet, nice, good man, Dr. Dee Williams from Denver. He said to me, "Why is it that you have changed your style so drastically?" And I said, "Why, Dee, I don't know how to answer that because I wasn't aware that I had changed my style. Why do you ask?" And his answer was, and this is not verbatim, "Well, you opened the seminar last night with a concert, and I heard you play things that I have just never heard you play before." My response was, "There is your answer. I have been playing the same things for years because people ask me to — you know, 'Jealousy' and 'Ebb Tide' and 'Dancing Tambourine.' I love all those numbers or I never would have played them in the first place, but last night I purposely chose a program of things that I have hardly ever played in public. And I did that to show that, perhaps, you could be interested in some music for the sake of music, and that the registration and tone of the organ would please you, that I had selected the right things to go with the type of music that was being played. That is the only truthful answer that I can give you, because I feel that I haven't changed my style. My style, if any, is made up of so many elements gleaned through the years — you can't put a name on me — I'm not this, and I'm not that. I'm nothing, and yet I'm everything, and I thank God that I have been fortunate enough to have been in the right places at the right times to have gotten the kind of jobs that I have had. And so I have played in so many different situations, so many different kinds of music, that they overlap, and a little of this style blends with a little of that, and through the years a flavor creeps in here and there from the past." So I have wandered far afield again. Did I straighten out anything at all?

*Hedberg:* You're working at it.

*Wright:* As you see, I'm a shy thing. I'm very reticent about talking in public, and I don't feel at ease or anything like that. The minute I started this I felt your warmth and your interest, and I thank you for that. I want to say something else to you, too. I was asked by several of you, "You mean you are going to the convention and you're not going to play one note?" And I said, "That's right." Wrong! (at this point, George took a small organ pipe from his pocket and played one note.)

*Hedberg:* The tone I seem to be hearing from you — you're laying real heavy on the music — on the art of music.

*Wright:* That's it!

*Hedberg:* Well, that IS it, of course. Without the music, there's no point in having the organ because it is only the tool to

play the music to get the feeling across to the listener. With that idea in mind, what can ATOS do to keep the music alive — to keep the calibre of music high. If the organ is to carry on into the future — and ATOS, too, for that matter — it's the music that has to get it there. This is what I am hearing you say.

*Wright:* In the final analysis, in my opinion, it is the music that is of first importance — not the player — not the instrument. It is the music — or it should be. If you can find a capable player who can translate the music to the instrument, they you have a winning combination.

*Hedberg:* What do you think about the music of the '80s and going into the '90s? There is so much electronic input going into it. Can you take that music and use it with the theatre organ? After all, like everyone else, we're all getting a little older.

*Wright:* Speak for yourself, old man.

*Hedberg:* And after this week, I'm a LOT older. But this technology that we have today, we hear it everywhere and it's so far removed from the instrument that we know and love — how are we going to get the music that's coming, that's being composed today, on the instrument that we love?

*Wright:* I think we have to look at it realistically and think of it this way — a lot that is being composed today is composed for these electronic instruments that you mentioned and is completely impossible to perform on a theatre organ. Okay, you might be able to play the notes, but it just wouldn't sound right because so much of it is without formal melody or any elaborate harmony as we know it. There is more accent on tone color and rhythm than on melody and harmony. I find the way popular music has gone to be very disturbing, very upsetting to me and just downright offensive at times. I had great hopes for the way it drifted along in the '60s and into part of the '70s. I felt that the Beatles, for instance, made a valid contribution to influencing the flavor of our songs and that those things they did were mostly at home on the theatre organ. And the Burt Bacharach songs — charming. And "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head" — people go 'ehhh' at that song — only because too many organists played it at the national convention that year and everyone was sick of it — but that doesn't mean it isn't a good song. I find it very disturbing that the acid rock and punk rock occupy such a large part of the time on the radio. And that isn't just because I'm old and out of it. You see, I keep track of these things. I keep listening. The music may turn me off, but I don't turn the radio off because I've got to keep abreast of the times. As

a performer, in respect to my God-given talent, I have to keep listening to things that may possibly add another facet to my abilities. I keep on learning — I don't vegetate and stagnate. But then, this music I call upsetting, unmusical, offensive does kind of go along with the perilous times we live in — gang warfare, drug dealing, theft — and on the radio, some clown singing a song about drugs, and I think this is just inexcusable. Even if I did like these forgettable melodies, my conscience wouldn't let me repeat them. I see no reason for me to translate that to the thing that I do. I do, however, think that we must keep an open mind about music. Throughout the ages of popular music in America, the oldsters have been saying, "Oh, this popular music is so awful — that Charleston — it's just too fast and racy." We're doing the same thing today.

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*... It's like the guy said on the corner of 7th Avenue and 57th in New York, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" And the answer he heard was, "Practice, man, practice."*

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*Hedberg:* Is this why — what seems to be happening more and more — certainly in your new recordings on your own instrument — we hear more modern electronic embellishments?

*Wright:* Yes, but not because I am thinking "Well, George, old boy, you've got to keep up with the times. Let's put a synthesizer in there and that will make everything all hip." I won't endear myself to the purists of the organ world by what I am going to say, but you ask very astute questions and I feel I have to say what I have to say. I have to go back to the 16th or 17th centuries in England when an organbuilder and an instrument-maker friend of his built a harpsichord or a clavichord into the church organ at St. Somethings-on-the-Thames, and the purists raised holy hell about it. They said, "How dare you desecrate God's instrument by putting a clap-trap thing like that on it!" And they paid no attention to it. But it died a natural death because it was impossible to keep the stringed instrument in tune with the pipe organ. The same thing happened when people like

Hope-Jones starting putting drums and cymbals, glockenspiels, and pianos and chimes on pipe organs. The purists hollered, "You're desecrating! You're making a band organ and this is a calliope! It's just terrible!" But the theatre organ thrived on that sort of thing, and I think it was very adventurous of the companies to think "to heck with the purists — we're going to manufacture something more entertaining. And if you will note the Wurlitzer Company, for instance, as late as the late twenties and early thirties, the end of the era, kept coming up with newer things for their organs, newer percussions, newer kinds of voicing. So, I see nothing wrong at this point with incorporating other technologies into this wonderful instrument. I think it shows that it IS a wonderful instrument in that you can take a set of contacts and electronically or mechanically play another

kind of instrument instead of just the glockenspiel or the chimes or what-not. You can play a synthesizer — you can play a sampler — you can play a something. It's got to be done with taste — with discretion — the two have to be integrated artistically so that they complement each other. And so, if we do use an electronic adjunct to an organ, it mustn't upstage the pipe organ. Have I answered that question?

*Hedberg:* You have. Now, I've saved something here that is the real focus of what I'm trying to emphasize at this convention, and that is to make ATOS realize that the future *does* lie with the young people.

*Wright:* Amen.

*Hedberg:* And we'd better be getting on with it, trying to do more to get the young people interested in this and get the music they are most familiar with to integrate as best we can with the theatre organ. There are several young people here tonight — some are performing at

(continued)

this convention, others are guests. There are many others who will hear about this event throughout the country, people who have these little buds, little seeds of interest, maybe cropping up about the theatre organ. And you, the man who probably carries the greatest influence of anyone in the world, will affect the music and the survival of the theatre organ. What would you say to these young people who are starting to show some interest in the instrument and, with God willing and a little luck, might really pursue it?

*Wright:* Simple — tell them the truth. It's like the guy said on the corner of 7th Avenue and 57th in New York, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" And the answer he heard was, "Practice, man, practice." It's an old story, but a true one. I say to the young people, there have been too many just downright untalented, bad organ teachers around. There have been some good ones, but, for example, I think terrible harm has been done to a lot of people by teaching them to play with the Pointer System. This is no place to start for someone who wants to be a professional. So I say to the young people, study the piano. Study the classical piano and learn that first. (Applause). Thank you for supporting me in that. I know it's true. The organ is easy to play if you can play the piano halfway well. You can ask Lew Williams, who came to me some twenty years ago and asked me to hear him play, and I did, and I gave him an evaluation, and I was totally honest with him — and he was good then, and he's great now! I said, "What you need is concentrated classical piano study, and then go back to the organ." So that is the first word of wisdom. Learn to read music. It's easy. There are only seven letters to learn — twenty-six to learn to read English, but only seven to learn to read music — it's inexcusable that you can't read music — only because you won't. And the standards of music, I think, get higher and higher through the years, and this calls upon everyone to improve himself by reading music and playing better. You must have, of course, a certain innate sense of what is right as far as tone color and taste.

Be yourselves. Try things. Be adventurous. Don't just use the Tibia because someone else does. How do you know? You might turn off the tremulant and use the Diapason instead, and say, "Hey, that's a wonderful effect!" Use unlikely registration in unlikely places. Be unexpected. Be daring. Be creative. And most of all, have fun and enjoy it, because then your fun and your enjoyment will be conveyed to the listener.

*Hedberg:* That about does it. Well said.

# OPENING OF NOMINATIONS for 1989 ELECTION OF DIRECTORS



*Note: Deadline is February 1, 1989*

It is time to nominate candidates for the National ATOS Board of Directors for the three-year term from July 1989 through June 1992. All regular ATOS members are eligible for nomination and may nominate themselves or be nominated by another member, 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.

The Board is currently taking action on several exciting programs which should increase public awareness of ATOS and set a course for the future. This is a great time to become involved at the national level of ATOS.

### *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 statements and photos mailed to the ATOS Secretary, 4 Santa Rita Ranch Road, Templeton, California 93465, **no later than February 1, 1989.**
- 3 ■ This year we are returning to the old method of a separate mailing of the ballots and resumes of the candidates. While this method is much more costly than placing the ballots in THEATRE ORGAN, we hope that it will encourage many more of you to vote for the candidates of your choice, thus 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. Telephone 203/633-5710.

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