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President's Message



It has been a year since I became president of the American Theatre Organ Society. I had high hopes about what could and should be done to further the cause of the Theatre Organ today. We've made some progress but certainly not what I had hoped for. Yes, the technical manual is out, but it was almost ready a year ago; yes, the radio show and headquarters/museum project are making definite headway, but as of now no final decision has been made on a headquarters/museum location. I will even admit that some of the goals that I set for myself have gone unfulfilled. I had hoped for an army of volunteers to accomplish some of our ATOS goals . . . that, too, did not materialize. Ongoing programs have gone on, the membership numbers are basically stable, all in all, things have remained "status quo." About the only thing that has changed is the fact that we all are a year older.

Folks, we need some "shaking up" if the American Theatre Organ Society is to survive well into the twenty-first century . . . that's only 10 years and 6 months away. We must find some way to put the theatre organ into the forefront of public attention. Oh, let's be honest and admit the theatre organ will never replace presently popular musical idioms, but it does deserve a greater share.

In a major U.S. city this year, two non-ATOS/non-musical groups sponsored two sold-out theatre organ concerts in a 2,000 seat theatre. These concerts were not theatre organ alone; they featured a silent motion picture . . . and they were affiliated with a community concern or effort. The promoters also effectively used the media, both through "freebies" and paid advertising to present their programs to the community. What can we learn from these enterprises that use the theatre organ so successfully? Possibly we need to look at whether we "promote" or "present" our theatre organ concerts.

Let us look at the definitions of the two words:

PRESENT: In attendance

PROMOTE: To further the growth

Which best defines the goals of ATOS? Do we "promote" or do we "present"? Both of the above mentioned concerts did at least two things differently than the general theatre organ concert. First, they used the media successfully, both through "freebies" and paid advertising. If a chapter spends \$2,000 on an artist and venue and then spends \$300 on advertising, their chances of success are minimal in most areas of the country. It takes money to make money . . . don't skimp on the advertising budget! Second, both promoters of the above concerts used the Theatre Organ in conjunction with another form of entertainment, i.e. a silent film. Like it or not, a Theatre Organ concert needs to be augmented with variety, be it a silent film, a vaudeville act or whatever. Other than dyed-in-the-wool Theatre Organ fans, most people require more at a concert than an organist playing with his or her back to the audience for two hours! Spice up those shows; get some variety in them. If nothing else, the non-theatre organ portions will draw people with different interests who might become aficionados of the Greatest Instrument on Earth (my apologies to P.T. Barnum). Let's all get out "there" and make a difference for ATOS. I've asked for volunteers and received a somewhat smaller response than I had hoped for. Please reconsider and become a voice for the Theatre Organ, today!

Sincerely,

John Ledwon