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President's Message



Welcome to the last decade of the Twentieth Century. The Nineties are upon us! The Theatre Organ has reached an age which qualified it for antique status, but is this what we really want? Let us not let this versatile instrument get relegated, banished, exiled or displaced from the current stream of contemporary music makers.

A Letter to the Editor by Donald Wood, printed in this issue, got me to thinking about the future of the Theatre Organ. Needing only the slightest excuse to climb upon my now well-worn soap box . . .

One of the goals of the American Theatre Organ Society, as we enter the waning years of the Twentieth Century, **MUST** be to see that this fabulous instrument is NOT left to rot or decay as a museum piece. Our "chosen" instrument has too much to offer future generations for us to allow this to happen.

And how do we accomplish this? BY ACTING IN CONCERT now, today, to insure that the Theatre Organ will be a viable concert instrument well into the twenty-first century. Some of the prerequisites for this to be accomplished have already been begun: Many theatre organs have been placed in locations which make them viable economic instruments (unfortunately money is still *one* of the bottom lines), and a good supply of musicians capable of performing professionally on the instruments well into the 21st Century are already in the pipeline. Where does that leave us? Presently in reasonably good shape. But wait, by the year 2010 where are we . . . and it doesn't much matter where *you* will be by then, *WE* must lay the groundwork in the 1990s or there will be no 2010 for the Theatre Organ.

Here is my scenario concerning what needs to be done:

1. Our audience base *must* be expanded to include people in their 30s and 40s. Without this younger base all is lost. It makes little sense to give these remarkable instruments a secure new home if we don't also give them an audience that will be alive to listen to them in 2010.

2. We must develop a "concert circuit" or artist's registry or some other method of insuring that organists who choose to dedicate their professional lives to the Theatre Organ can in fact earn a decent living in their chosen profession.

3. We must encourage new avenues of experimentation in staging and content of Theatre Organ concerts (that one will get me some letters). What worked in the 20s and 30s will not necessarily be successful in the 90s and 00s.

4. We must insist that current theatre organists exhibit the styles, techniques and music of the time period we currently live in. This does not mean all programming must be contemporary, but an increasing portion must be dedicated to current musical trends. (This should get me even more letters!)

5. We must encourage young people to "learn the trade" of Theatre Organ building. The American Theatre Organ Society must develop an Apprentice Theatre Organ Technicial Program to insure a supply of technicians in the year 2010.

6. Theatre Organ owners (both commercial and private) of means should use professional Theatre Organ Technicians whenever possible so that these professionals will hire young people who will learn the trade. (I'll get lots of letters on this one!)

7. We must all do our part in publicizing the merits of the Theatre Organ. We are the curators (possibly a poor choice of words, the Theatre Organ should not be relegated to a museum) of a piece of Americana that could be lost to all but a few if we don't act **TODAY** to insure its insertion into the mainstream of performing arts.

Well, these are my ideas for the perpetuation of the Theatre Organ. They are but suggestions. They are there to make you think. Something needs to be done now, during what possibly could be called a second "Golden Age" of Theatre Organ, to insure its future. Things are going well today, and this should continue for several more years. Let us not get complacent but rather work all the more diligently now while we have the personnel and spirit to grow and expand.

The challenge of the 90s is there, we **CAN** meet it!

JUST DO IT!
John Ledwon