

# The Organ Spiel

NEWSLETTER FOR THE SIERRA CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY

ORGAN CONCERT

NOVEMBER 2022



## 22ND GEORGE WRIGHT TRIBUTE CONCERT

\$12/ADVANCE  
\$15/AT THE DOOR



GRANT UNION  
High School

1400 Grand Avenue  
Sacramento

Sunday,

Nov. 13th

2:00 PM

Box Office opens at 1:00PM

The four-manual twenty-one rank theatre pipe organ at Grant Union High School was installed over a period of one year from 1938 to 1939. Pipe work and chests were obtained from theatre organs in Redding and San Francisco, California, and Reno, Nevada. The best parts were used to assemble the organ by students under the direction of Fred Wood, an organ builder from Oakland. The new Grant organ was presented to the public in a recital by Howard Scott and George Wright on December 8, 1939. Recent improvements to the organ have been completed including a replacement Post horn more suitable to the size of the Grant auditorium.

**For advance tickets, mail a check payable to Sierra Chapter ATOS at our Fair Oaks PO box and tickets will be held for you at the Auditorium Box Office. Or you can order online at: [sierrachapterATOS.org](http://sierrachapterATOS.org)**



## GUEST ARTIST WALT STRONY



**Walt Strony** is one of America's premier concert organists. Since his debut in 1974 at the age of 18, he has established himself as one of the few organists equally at home playing both theatre and classical organ.

Mr. Strony has performed from coast-to-coast in the United States as well as in Japan, Australia, England and Canada. He has performed for more conventions of the American Theatre Organ Society than anyone living, and has also performed numerous times for chapters of the America Guild of Organists.

This well-rounded musician brings a wealth of experience to any organ console. This experience has brought him the reputation of being one of America's most original and interesting sounding organists. As one reviewer noted years ago -- "Strony has become one of the rare breed of today's younger theatre organists to have developed a style uniquely his own. While looking backwards, respectfully to the masters of theatre organ tradition, he manages to look forward with a refreshing approach in all his musical arrangements." "It is a style that is inventive, harmonically interesting, and above all, right for today."



## Two Heads are Better Than One!

By William Coale, Ph.D.

The definitive compendium of US theatre organists is finally coming together

As Julie Andrews said in “The Sound of Music,” “Let’s start at the very beginning.” While researching for the George Wright biography, I naturally stumbled upon numerous nonGW items of interest. As a trained researcher, I just couldn’t “catch and release”—I needed to hang onto these little gems, lest they be lost to the ages. As the number of these “finds” increased, I realized that they deserved a digital home where they could be easily located and viewed. That led me to a search of digital products for accomplishing such digital magic, and finally settled on AirTable. I could customize the fields, and adding attachments was a breeze. More important, the database could easily be put on line, with the added bonus of updating in real time should I edit or add an entry (on my computer OR my smartphone!).

The digital snippets kept accumulating, and at some point I ran across some theatre organist biographical snippets that Jesse Crawford biographer Dr. John Landon had published in “Theatre Organ” back in the 80s. I had had many nice email conversations with John prior to that, commiserating about the trials and tribulations of the biographer, of course, so I contacted him about my most recent discovery. I quickly discovered that John had acquired a treasure trove of biographical information through his ongoing dedicated research, and he graciously offered to share it all with me. The die was cast. Our combined efforts needed to be input and offered on public display so theatre organ aficionados worldwide could enjoy the fruits of our labor. Currently, it’s posted on the GW website: <https://www.geniusofgeorgewright.com/theatre-organist-database.html>

The Table can be searched, filtered, and sorted, to help the viewer find exactly what they’re looking for. Attachments can also be downloaded.

I have currently input John’s A-G organists along with my own findings, so clearly there is MUCH more to come! There are currently around 3,000 records, listing organists and the theatres they played. In addition, my research had included at least one photo/review/article/ advertisement with each record. Once all of John’s organists are entered into the database, the fun continues—finding documentation (attachments) for as many on the list as possible. Last year, I purchased a huge RAID array (massive computer storage for you non-tech types). I spent a great deal of time and effort locating digital archives of trade journals (including “Theatre Organ”) that I downloaded in PDF format. I am now able to search dozens of journals SIMULTANEOUSLY using the “advanced search” function in Adobe Acrobat. I can do other things while the computer chugs away and ultimately spits out a PDF document that lists every occurrence of what I search for, including hyperlinks with samples of the text surrounding the search terms. This way, I can quickly view the results, eliminating those that aren’t pertinent. When I see one that looks promising, clicking on the hyperlink will not only open up the corresponding document—it will open to the precise page where the search result is located. Ain’t technology great!

In addition to the enormous effort expended to create this (I’ll be working on it for YEARS to come, assuming I’m still “taking oxygen” (as John Nelson so nicely puts it), there is a significant cost to making this publicly accessible on the web. In light of that, we hope to solicit some individual/corporate/organization sponsors to help defray costs, and give them conspicuous credit, of course, on the webpage! Please take a few moments to visit the site. If you have items to add (or correct!), please let us know. Instructions are on the website. ENJOY!

*Editor’s note: As if Bill isn’t busy enough with this project, he also has been awarded a \$2,000 research fellowship grant from the Organ Historical Society (OHS) to organize, digitize and transcribe the letters of organ correspondent Eric Reeve.*

### Closing Chord - Bob Suffel

Aug 13, 1943 - Aug 31, 2022

Bob was a long time member of the Sierra and NorCal chapters of ATOS. For a period of time he also served as Treasurer for Sierra Chapter. As an alumni of UCLA with a degree in Journalism, he was a scholar of broadcasting, especially radio. Look for a Closing Chord in the November-December issue of Theatre Organ Magazine.

### ANNUAL ELECTION OF BOARD MEMBERS

Nominations are still being accepted for positions beginning in 2023. If you are a member of ATOS National and have not yet gotten involved at the chapter level...this is your opportunity!

*Ask not what Sierra Chapter can do for you...ask, what can I do for Sierra Chapter?*

It takes a lot of people to keep the chapter machinery running and we have fun doing it! *The success of every nonprofit organization depends on its volunteers.*

**Contact the chapter if you are interested.**  
[sierrachapteratos@comcast.net](mailto:sierrachapteratos@comcast.net)

## PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE – Randy Warwick



On behalf of the national ATOS organization of which Sierra Chapter is an affiliate, this month I am asking our Chapter members who are not national members to join national ATOS using the new member offer of \$25.00 for the first year. Even if you do not attend conventions the cost for each issue of Theatre Organ magazine drops to barely over \$4.00 an issue.

If you want some evidence of what ATOS does in support of theatre organ that can give you more information, peruse the national ATOS website at [www.ATOS.org](http://www.ATOS.org).

We look forward to seeing you at the GW Tribute concert featuring the incredible Walt Strony and in early December the Christmas party at the Jacob residence in Davis.

### Closing Chord - Jim Riggs

1956 - 2022

#### From Matias Bombal:

To fully understand the impact, musically, of the artistry of my dearest friend, theatre organist Jim Riggs, who died October 3rd at just 66 years of age, one had to attend a concert in person, not only for the value of the physical presence of the many theatre organs that he played over the years and the great rooms into which that wined sound spoke; but to feel the absolute electricity in the room when he was at the console. Not only was it time travel to the golden age and music of the movie palace, but the truly THRILLING excitement that his playing created. *Absolute showmanship.*

Edward Millington Stout III describes an aspect of his singular style as "He had a most special feeling for the "note value" while playing a Wurlitzer organ, that centered on the mili-second timing between the left hand and the Pedal note. He heard and "played the room!" There is no doubt that in following in the footsteps of his mentor and teacher James Clinton Roseveare at the Paramount Theatre of the Arts, he was the very heartbeat of the art-moderne theatre when at the console there, rendering the Wurlitzer as a visceral, palpable, living and breathing wonder that indelibly touched audiences in a way that they will never forget it as long as they may live. Jim made memories that audiences will hold in their hearts for a lifetime. Some readers here will know of my recent digitization project of theatre organ recordings that I have been doing for the past several months.

In that time, 30 performances (just over 42 hours) from many different times and places in Jim's career have now been preserved and you may hear them all at the click of a link. To facilitate this further, I have created a playlist of just Jim's concerts and his other non-commercial recordings (link below), that you may hear his career in music, rhythm and harmony. As his book-  
ing advertisement used to herald, A RIGGS CONCERT ALWAYS MEANS HAPPY AUDIENCES. Join me in savoring hours of his artistry that will last as long as we may continue to listen:

<https://tinyurl.com/mvscjzhc>

### MEMBERSHIP NEWS

#### Welcome Back:

Matias A. Bombal

#### Renewing at the Benefactor Level:

William Coale, Ph.D.

Ernest Hartley & Susan Fredericks

Jim Jordan

Tom Sebo & Cheryl Young



#### Renewing at the Patron Level:

Walt Strony

#### Renewing at the Sustaining Level:

Jim & Denise Brown

#### Renewing at the Contributing Level:

David & Linda Dewey

**NOTE:** Your memberships can now be renewed online. See your mailing label for your expiration month and year. Go to:

[SierraChapterATOS.org/onlineapplication.html](http://SierraChapterATOS.org/onlineapplication.html)

Select your Membership Option  
and click on Add to Cart.

**You will then be directed to pay by  
Credit Card or PayPal.**

### Clubhouse Update

Bobo Construction continues to work the project site at Village Park; currently, they are working to backfill the parking areas. Soon, they will be pouring concrete for curbs and gutters before paving the parking stalls themselves. Once those are done, the parking areas will once again be open for public use while Bobo continues other portions of the project.

Construction on the ADA ramp to the Clubhouse entrance has been paused in order to enact a federally required NEPA study as part of the ~\$500k grant the District is receiving through Congressman Ami Bera's office.

As we move into the rainy season, expect delays. The District still expects to remain on schedule despite these eventual slow-downs.



P.O. Box 2017

[www.sierrachapterATOS.org](http://www.sierrachapterATOS.org)

YouTube [youtube.com/SierraChapterATOS](https://www.youtube.com/SierraChapterATOS)

Twitter [twitter.com/sierrachapter](https://twitter.com/sierrachapter)

Facebook [Sierra-Chapter-ATOS](https://www.facebook.com/Sierra-Chapter-ATOS)

First Class

Postage

Stamp

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR EVENTS

### SIERRA CHAPTER/ GRANT UNION ALUMNI EVENT

Grant Union High School  
1400 Grand Ave  
Sacramento, CA

**Sunday,  
November 13  
2:00PM**

**WALT  
STRONGY**

\$12 Advance  
\$15 At the Door  
Students - Free



### SIERRA CHAPTER EVENT

Jacob Music Room  
48 College Park  
Davis, CA

### Annual Meeting And Christmas Party

**Saturday,  
December 3rd, 2022  
2:00PM**

**Featuring: Jim Brown**

**More details in the next  
Organ Spiel**



### SIERRA CHAPTER EVENT Fair Oaks Community Clubhouse 7997 California Ave Fair Oaks, CA

**The Fair Oaks  
Community Clubhouse  
is currently Closed  
for renovation.**

Stay tuned for an expected  
re-opening in late 2023.

The Chapter was organized in 1968 as a not-for-profit corporation under the statutes of the State of California and is recognized as tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and Section 23701d of the California Revenue and Taxation Code. It was organized for the purpose of preservation and promotion of the Theatre Pipe Organ and its music. Membership in the local Chapter also encourages membership in the National Organization, American Theatre Organ Society (ATOS.) [www.atos.org](http://www.atos.org)