

**SUNDAY, APRIL 20TH, 3 P.M.**

***Peachtree Christian Church—Herb Buffington, Organist***

***About the Artist...***

A native of Atlanta, Herbert Buffington has been the PCC organist and assistant choirmaster since 1996. He received his B.A. from Duke University and the Master of Music degree from The Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University. European study was with Peter Planyavsky at St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, Austria. He has presented concerts in the U.S. and Europe, and is also a composer of organ and choral works. Herb was formerly organist and choirmaster at the Decatur Presbyterian Church.



division located on the gallery rail behind the console.

The two organs were reconciled in 1992 by Solid State Logic of London, England so that they may be played separately, antiphonally or in tandem from the gallery console. Recent tonal and mechanical revisions and additions to both instruments by Daniel Angerstein of North Carolina and Walker Technical Company of Pennsylvania (creators of Walker digital organs) have made the installation one of the largest and most unique in the country.

***About The Organs of Peachtree...***

The organ in the sanctuary of the Peachtree Christian Church is actually two separate organs. The Mimms Chancel Organ is the original sanctuary organ and was constructed by Henry Pilcher's Sons of Louisville, Kentucky in 1928. The instrument is typical of that era and contains many orchestral imitative voices as well as broad-scale principal choruses. In 1957 the Pilcher console was retired and a new console built by the Austin Organ Company was installed.

Some of you may remember that Peachtree Christian Church was the site of the classical concert during the 1978 ATOS convention with Sue Goddard and Gregory Colson playing the two organs that were separated.

This church has the largest collection of English stained glass east of the Mississippi and it is truly beautiful.

There will be open console(s) afterwards which will give those who attend Larry's seminar an opportunity to put what they've learned into practice.

The Collins-Williams Gallery Organ was built by Fratelli Ruffatti of Padua, Italy and was installed in 1974 during a time when historic concepts of organ design and construction were being re-discovered. The voicing of this organ is a synthesis of North German Baroque and American Classic traditions and the installation includes a free-standing Ruckpositiv

***LOCATION***

The church is at 1580 Peachtree Street, NW, Atlanta, the intersection of Peachtree and Spring Streets. The parking lot is accessible from Spring Street. For detailed directions see: [www.peachtree.org/contact/directions.html](http://www.peachtree.org/contact/directions.html)

***Playing the Stops – Flying by the Seat of Your Pants,  
A Seminar by Fox Theatre Organist-in-Residence Larry Douglas Embury  
Saturday, April 19, 2008, 3:00 P.M.— Bucky Reddish Residence***

How do you sit down at an organ that you've never seen before and make great music?

Larry will conduct two seminars on "Playing the Stops" that will demonstrate the answer to that question. Bucky welcomes us to his home for the first of these seminars and it is a program not just for those who play but also for those who are fascinated with how an organist does what he does.

*Please note that this does not replace a monthly meeting, but is a supplement to our regular program schedule.*

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### ***No Code Blue in Newnan !!***

Our January Meeting took place on Sunday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, at the Newnan residence of Ms. Elsie and Bob McKoon. Originally, the meeting was to have been in January, but threats of ice and snow led to the decision to reschedule. The weather cooperated and allowed a great day for the hour trip south of Atlanta.

The McKoon home is a beautiful site for a meeting, and the Allen 3/17 Custom theatre organ has a fresh, new live sound – the carpeting in the great room has been removed!!

After a brief business meeting, the music and artist took control of the day and took us on a tour of great variety.

The artist was Larry Davis – past President of the Atlanta Chapter and now Vice President. Larry easily addresses his audience and has a genuine love of the music he presents.

First off, being a science-fiction buff, we were treated to selections from the opera house catacombs to the far-reaches of outer space: “Also Sprach Zarathustra” from 2001: a Space Odyssey (and also grand opera) led to “Music of the Night” from the Phantom of the Opera, then we battled our way in “Star Wars,” and even had a quick visit with “E. T. the Extraterrestrial.”

Next, a selection of Henry Mancini favorites included: “Days of Wine and Roses,” “Moon River,” (for John McCall (holding forth at the Rylander Theatre in Americus, Georgia) and “The Sweetheart Tree.”

Then the Lady Singers arrived! First up was one of Larry’s all-time favorites, Ms. Ethel Waters, and her signature songs “On With the Show,” “Birmingham Bertha,” “Cabin in the Sky,” and “Taking a Chance on Love.”

Kate Smith made the next appearance and had all singing and humming along with her great selections of “When the Moon Comes Over the Mountain,” “Please,” and “Don’t Blame Me.”

Next up was Patsy Cline. She treated us to “I Fall to Pieces,” “Walkin’ After Midnight,” and “Crazy.”

A two-selection medley featuring One Old and One New tune having similar form and mood – the theme for “Little Orphan Annie,” and a tune penned by chapter member John McCall titled “Meet Me at the Dempsey Corner.”

“Along the Road to Gundgai” was a selection introduced to Larry by Australian Organ Virtuoso David Johnson. Larry gave a brief history of the selection and then took us all to the outback for a listen.

The final selections reflected on the easy, happy and fun spirit of the day, featuring two songs from the musical Mary Poppins: “Let’s Go Fly a Kite” and “Feed the Birds.”

If the artist thought he could escape after that, the fact that the audience surrounded him and allowed no exit, until an encore was presented, well, he just segued us right to the wonderful food and refreshments awaiting us by his selection of the tune “Supertime !”

The organ registrations were imaginative and well-chosen, showing off great solo stops and rich ensembles. The music struck home with the audience and a mood of relaxation and great fun made the day a hit.

Comments and observations provided courtesy of **Biz E. Body**, a completely unbiased ear — remember, the walls have ears.

### ***Closing Chord***

Atlanta Chapter member **John Sheffield** was found in his residence deceased on Friday, March 28th. He will be missed.

## **Upcoming Meetings & Events** *(Mark your Calendars)*

- April 5th, 7:30 P.M., Tivoli Theater in Chattanooga, ***Gospel Legends in Concert*** Sponsored by Chattanooga – Hamilton County Rescue Service Starring: The Stamps Quartet, The Blackwood Brothers Quartet, The Blackwood Singers, The Testimony Quartet. Members of the Atlanta Chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society (Ron Carter & Larry Davis) to play the Wurlitzer 235 Special Pipe Organ placed at the Tivoli Theater in 1925. For ticket information call 423-642-8497 or online at [www.etixs.com](http://www.etixs.com). All seats reserved.
- **April 19th, 3 P.M., Playing the Stops Seminar by Larry Douglas Embury at the Reddish residence**
- **April 20th, 3 P.M., Meeting, Herb Buffington at Peachtree Christian Church in Atlanta**
- May 16th, 7:30 P.M., Inaugural Concert on the new Allen organ at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church by Nicholas Bowden, 1499 South Main Street, Moultrie, GA. Free and open to the public. 229-616-1116; [www.stmargaretsmoultrie.org](http://www.stmargaretsmoultrie.org)
- **May 18th 3 P.M., Meeting, Hamm-O-Rama at Joe Patten's apartment in the Fox Theatre**
- **June 29th, 3 P.M., Meeting, Ron Rhode at the Reddish residence**

**Atlanta Chapter member Bob Fountain invites you to join him at McKinnon's Louisiane Restaurant, 3209 Maple Drive NE in Buckhead following our meeting on the 20th. Bob will be playing organ for an informal get-together starting at 6 p.m.**

**The Atlanta Fox Theatre and its Möller Organ:  
The Early Years: Part 1** by John Tanner

When you mention the words Fox Theatre to anyone in Atlanta all sorts of memories are conjured up. People will talk about their fond memories and events that they attended in the past. Some will even tell you that they have tickets to some upcoming event. I add the upcoming events, because of all the theatres that I have written about in previous articles, the Fox is the only one of the downtown movie theatres that has survived. Not only has it survived with its original appearance, the theatre has flourished and is now ranked as one of the top theatres in the country.

When people talk about the Fox, one thing that is common in many of their discussions is the organ.

Many of us have heard the organ on numerous occasions, from pre-show programs, silent movies and best of all when it is the solo instrument for the program. Many of us are familiar with the local personalities who have played the organ since the early 1960's, including Bob Van Camp, Walt Winn, Robby Irwin, Jay Mitchell, Ken Double, Jerry Meyers, and current house organist Larry Douglas Embury.

Many of us remember the concerts of Lyn Larsen, Virgil Fox, Hector Olivera, Dennis James, Ron Rice, and a whole host of outstanding artists ranging from Chapter Meetings, the 1978 ATOS convention, and most recently the Fabulous Fox Organ Weekend in 2004.

One person who is synonymous with the organ is of course Joe Patten who for 45 years, with the help of others, has endeavored to keep the Möller Organ in the Fox, one of our national musical treasures.

However, the history of the Fox and its Möller organ go back almost 80 years. In histories of the theatre not much is written about the early years of the Fox and the organists who played the organ. Such will be the subject of this article, which will cover from roughly 1925 (yes that's correct) to the outbreak of World War II.

In May of 1925, the Shriners met at the old Lyric theatre on Carnegie Way, to formally launch the campaign to build a Shrine Temple in Atlanta. At this meeting the Illustrious Potentate, Charles Bowen, was authorized to proceed ahead with the planning of a temple that would in the main auditorium hold 10,000 persons and have ample meeting and rehearsal halls to house the activities of the Shriners. "The assembly hall will be large enough to take care of both winter and summer opera crowds and any other gathering which may

convene in Atlanta", Atlanta Constitution May 17, 1925.

By September of 1925, the Shriners were ready to go public with the first renderings of what the new \$1,000,000 dollar mosque would look like. The structure would completely cover the entire property that the Shriners had acquired at the corner of Peachtree and Kimball Streets (now Ponce De Leon) across the street from the Georgian Terrace Hotel.

**Atlanta's Aladdin Lamp**



Atlanta Constitution Oct. 25, 1925

By late 1927 the Shriners had raised almost 2 million dollars. By this time the overall design of the building had changed considerably, with the local firm of Marye, Alger and Vinour being chosen to make the final architectural designs which were very close to how the building would be built. The only thing left now was a party to guarantee the income needed to finally begin construction and provide income to the Shriners.

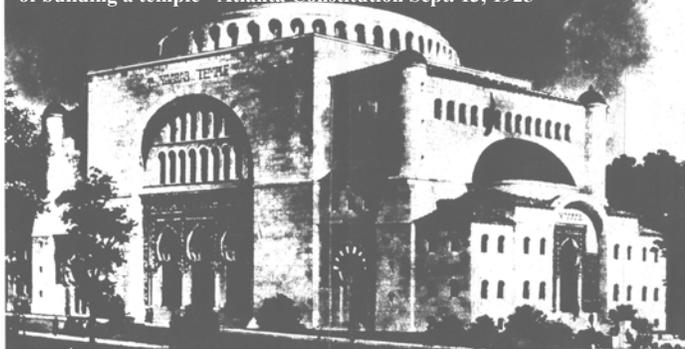
At this time William Fox was planning what would sometimes be termed as the Super Fox theatres.

These would be some of the largest movie palaces in the country all seating close to, if not more than, 5000. These "Super Theatres" would be located in different cities around the country. San Francisco, Detroit, St. Louis, Brooklyn, and Atlanta would be where these theatres would be built.

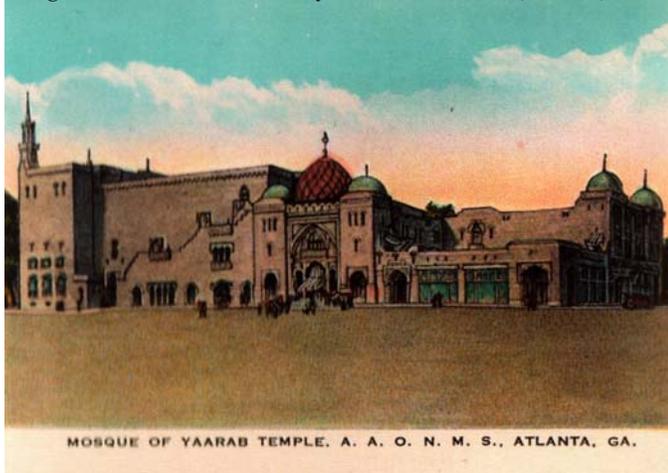
The timing for the Shriners was perfect. They had already done the design work and had plans ready to start, Fox had the money, and so with a few minor changes in the building's design, the Shriners and William Fox reached an agreement in late January 1928.

(Continued on page 4)

"This is what the Shriners had in mind when they began the process of building a temple" Atlanta Constitution Sept. 13, 1925



"Postcard rendering of new Shrine Temple as envisioned by Marye, Alger and Vinour." Published by R & R News Co. Inc., Atlanta, GA.



From the very beginning of the Shriners' desire to build a new temple, one of the major considerations was an organ. If one visits around the country to the various Shriners' facilities, especially the ones built in the first third of the 20th century, one will usually find a pipe organ, and the one here in Atlanta would be no different.

As to how exactly the choice of the builder of the organ was arrived at is not known, but there are some bits of information that may shed some light onto the choices.

In the beginning of the process of choosing a builder for the organ, one can assume that the style of the organ would be more along the lines of a concert organ, such that is found in many of the other Shrine temples.

I have a letter in my files from the Austin Organ Company representative addressed to the manager of the Soldiers Memorial Auditorium in Chattanooga, wanting to set up an appointment so that he can bring the organist and the architect for the new Shrine building, to study the large Austin in the Auditorium.

There is also some speculation that Henry Pilcher and Sons would be a choice for the organ. Dr. Charles Sheldon was the city organist and was instrumental in the design of many of the organs in Atlanta, and at that time his favored builder was Pilcher. So Pilcher was probably in the running.

Möller would have certainly been in the running with the Möller in the Temple Theatre in Montgomery, Alabama and the large Möller organ in the City Auditorium in Macon, Georgia.

However, with advent of William Fox being the major tenant of the building, and the main use of the auditorium as a movie theatre, then the style of the organ began to change to one that would be more theatrical in nature. In June 1928, an article in the Atlanta Journal shortly after the deal between the Shriners and Fox was signed, there is reference that could indicate that Wurlitzer may have thought they had the contract. The article states "The stage large enough to accommodate the most pretentious productions will be built in sections, each of which may be elevated to form a terrace effect if desired. The entire orchestra pit will be built on a lift so that the orchestra may be raised to stage level or lowered below the sight of the audience. The same

arrangement will be provided for the console of the huge organ, *one of five specially-designed instruments*, said to be the largest in use in any American theatre."

This could refer to the "Fox Special" Wurlitzers that were to be installed in the Fox theatres in Detroit, St. Louis, San Francisco and Brooklyn. These organs were based somewhat on the design of the New York Paramount Wurlitzer.

As of February 1929 the contract for the organ had not been signed. The San Francisco Fox had just opened and almost opened without an organ. Fox officials wanted to cancel the contract for the organ because sound films were rapidly replacing silent films and that since many of the deluxe houses had orchestras the need for an organ became, in their eyes, a large economic issue and would provide a large cost savings in the cost of the theatre. However, Wurlitzer reminded the Fox officials that they had signed a contract and that the legal consequences would be larger than the cost of the organ. So the San Francisco Fox got its organ and it did become one of its major attractions.

Here in Atlanta, since a contract for the organ had not been signed, and that the theatre would not open until late 1929, and that sound pictures had almost completely replaced silent films, Fox official could have made that same argument here and it would have more merit. However, the Shriners needed an organ, so around April of 1929, a contract was signed between the Yaarab Temple and the Möller organ company. The organ was to be completed by Aug. 1, 1929, and installed in the theatre by December.

Yes that is right! M. P. Möller had basically only four months to build the Atlanta Fox Organ, which, if nothing else, was a testament to the capacity of the Möller Company to produce this fairly large instrument in so short a time. But then again, this is an organ company that in 1927-28 was producing an average of one organ a day.

The design of the organ (which will be discussed further in part 3) is an organ that is a combination theatre style organ and a concert organ, which would be better able to suit the needs of the theatre and also, the needs of the Shriners.

On Dec. 25th 1929, after almost 18 months of construction, the Atlanta Fox Theatre opened its doors to the public. One of the first items on the program was Iris Wilkins at the console of the Möller Deluxe Theatre Pipe Organ.

Next Issue: Part 2, The Early Fox organists — who were they, and what were some of the things they played?

### ATTENTION

In order to save club money, we are offering you the option of receiving your monthly newsletter in Adobe Acrobat (PDF) format by email instead of "snail" mail. This will not only save on postage expense, but reduce the reproduction and envelope costs. Also, it is in color. *Note:* These are fairly large files and this choice might not be satisfactory for dial-up internet connections.

*If this is your preference, please email  
elfields@yahoo.com.*