



ATOS ATLANTA



Official Newsletter of The Atlanta Chapter of
the American Theatre Organ Society

FOUR SILENT FILMS WITH FOUR ORGANISTS AT THE STRAND

Accompanied by your Favorite Players

Our Next Chapter Meeting

Sunday, February 22nd at 3:00 PM

The Earl and Rachel Smith Strand Theatre at 117 North Park Square, Marietta GA
Carter, Davis, Double, Hulsey, and Mitchell at the Console!



The Alabama Theatre
- Pages 3 & 4



Donnie Rankin & Nathan
Avakian – Pages 3 & 4



Ken Double playing,
Feb 22 – Pages 5 & 6

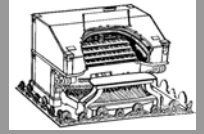


Larry Davis Playing
Feb 22 – Pages 5 & 6

Please renew your ATOS Chapter membership if you haven't done so.



Level	Base	Cap
Student	\$17.50	
Basic	\$35.00	
Donor	\$75.00	\$149.00
Contributor	\$150.00	\$249.00
Sponsor	\$250.00	\$499.00
Patron	\$500.00	And up



A Letter from your President

“Without Valentine’s Day, February would be... well, January.” – Jim Gaffigan

Welcome to grey, cold February—or as I like to call it, January Part II. As I write this, the landscape outside is tucked under a layer of ice. Inside is a bit more hospitable, thanks to a roaring fire and a hot cup of coffee, but enough of my meteorological opining. Let’s talk about something much warmer!

We kicked off the year with a mind-blowing January concert at The Alabama Theatre. It was a masterclass performance featuring the incomparable Nathan Avakian and Donnie Rankin, with fantastic percussion accompaniment by the Alabama Theatre’s own Donny Stults. This was my first time visiting the Alabama Theatre, and I was floored. While "Big Bertha" and the historic house were breathtaking, the highlight was the incredible hospitality shown to us by Gary Jones and the rest of the Alabama Chapter. A heartfelt thank you to our friends across the state line for hosting us—we already can’t wait to do it again!

This month, we’re keeping the momentum going closer to home. Our next chapter meeting will be held at The Earl and Rachel Smith Strand Theatre in Marietta on Sunday, February 22nd at 3:00 PM. We have a wonderful afternoon planned as a series of silent comedy shorts will be screened with live theatre organ accompaniment featuring the Allen GW4. There’s truly nothing like experiencing these film classics the way they were intended—with the power of a theatre organ filling the room.

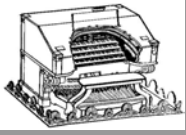
David Yackman

Mailing Address:

Lee Lanier
Atlanta Chapter, ATOS
220 Dunwoody Creek Circle
Sandy Springs, GA 30350
404-790-5400 www.atosatlanta.org
www.facebook.com/ATOSAtlanta

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Chapter Correspondent – Larry Davis
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Brady Born
Ron Carter
Ken Double
Randy Hendry
Eddie Hulsey
David Tuck
Strand Project – Ron Carter



DOUBLE TAKE AT BIRMINGHAM'S ALABAMA THEATRE



NATHAN AVAKIAN, DONNY STULTS, AND DONNIE RANKIN PERFORMING TOGETHER

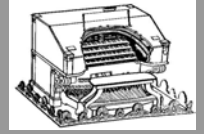
Act 1 opened by Donnie Rankin & Nathan Avakian playing *The Comedians' Gallop* by Dmitri Kabalevsky. They both played and it was an excellent introduction to what was to come.

Nathan then thanked Gary Jones, Larry Donaldson, Tom Helms, and the entire Alabama organ crew for their efforts in making this event possible.

Then Nathan took a solo run on *Take Five* by Dave Brubeck, in 5/4 time. I should mention that professional theater organists do a great deal with key changes, often in unexpected places. On this piece, however, that concept fairly goes beserk. This is not the expected transcription of the Brubeck piano arrangement. John Coltrane, a jazz saxophonist, does a bit of a deconstruction putting key changes into the body of the B section. Nathan is known for precise transcriptions of pop material. I still recall his note-perfect rendition of the fiddle solo in "Devil Went Down to Georgia" a few years ago when I heard him in concert, probably again on Bertha.

Our second Avakian number was *Blue Rondo a la Turk* also from Brubeck's 1959 album of all originals, with unusual time signatures, called "Time Out". Donnie Rankin joined playing the 9/8 rhythm on drums. These two numbers were released on both sides of a 45 rpm record. They, and the album, sold out in 1960.

At The Square is an original piece by Nathan Avakian commissioned for the New Jersey Journal's 150th anniversary. Sounds like a spirited romp through the country with lots of brass. Then both of them played *Venus* from "The Planets" (Holst) transcribed by Jelani Eddington. Donnie moved back to Big Bertha and played two country songs made popular by Glen Campbell: *Southern Nights* & *Wichita Lineman*. He described the second piece as one of the most touching songs ever written about someone who works for the phone company.



Then Nathan gave us *Eleanor Rigby* from the Beatles. It had a couple of surprise motifs added in. One was *Bad Guy* (Billie Eilish) and the other Bach's *D minor Toccata & Fugue*. He added a bass & drum track, something he often did in the past, such as on that "Devil Went Down" number I mentioned. This was followed by his last solo in Act 1, *The Star Spangled Banner*, reharmonized and arranged by Avakian with a piano track.

A mashup of nine spooky TV themes played by both of them (Donnie Rankin on drums rather than organ) closed out the section. I confess that the only one I could recognize was *The Twilight Zone*.



Nathan Avakian at Big Bertha



The Alabama from the Balcony Rear

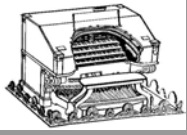


Donnie Rankin Introducing

Act 2 opened with Gary Jones telling us the relatively few number of theaters that featured two consoles: The Denver Paramount, The New York Paramount, and The Chicago Theatre, which added a second console to accommodate the most famous pair of organists, Helen and Jesse Crawford. Each console controls the entire organ independently. Radio City has two also, two identical black four-manual Wurlitzers controlling 58 ranks. That last one still exists as WAS.

Up Town Funk (don't believe me just watch) introduces Donny Stults on the drums. We hear all three playing for the first time (see the photo, top of page 3). Then Nathan & Donnie share a medley of movie music by John Williams including *The Flying Theme* from "ET", *Luke & Leia's Theme* from "Return of the Jedi", and *The Mission* (theme for NBC Nightly News), *Hymn to the Fallen* from "Saving Private Ryan", and to close it out, *The Imperial March* from "The Empire Strikes Back". It finished with a grand cipher which was quickly attended to by the Alabama's crack organ team.

As we neared the end, Nathan selected three atmospheric themes from Thomas Neuman's score to *Finding Nemo*. Donnie Rankin took a final solo turn on *Over the Rainbow* and then both played Rossini's *Overture to William Tell*. An encore is almost *de rigueur* and all three gave us a stirring rendition of Earth, Wind, & Fire's *November*.



I have to say that this was one of the more splendid things I have attended in a while. I am amazed by the subtle harmonies that a top tier theater organist can readily produce, particularly noteworthy in “Rainbow”.

Respectfully submitted by,

Brady Born
Editor (that took a trip)

FOUR SILENT COMEDY SHORTS AT THE EARL SMITH STRAND THEATRE

For February the Atlanta Chapter of ATOS will be meeting at the Strand Theatre for two Buster Keaton and two Harold Lloyd short format comedies, two reels. As you probably know, the chapter has a George Wright GW4 installed in the orchestra pit at Marietta’s iconic 1930’s Art Deco movie palace theatre. I personally find the comedies to be my favorite of the silents.

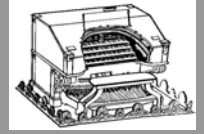
We will start off with Buster Keaton’s “*Cops*”. It is a 1922 American two reel film about a young man ([Buster Keaton](#)) who accidentally runs afoul of the entire Los Angeles Police Department during a parade and is chased all over town. Ken Double will be playing the accompaniment.

Our second film is Harold Lloyd in “*From Hand to Mouth*”. This one was made in 1919. This was the first film Lloyd made with frequent co-star (and future wife) Mildred Davis. The plot involves an heiress, a penniless young man, a dog, crooks, and the police. It is convoluted as many silents delight in being. Larry Davis handles the organ for this one.

The third showing is another Harold Lloyd, “*Get Out and Get Under*”. This one includes a boy, a girl, a wedding, a 1920 Model T (the year of the film so it was NEW), a play, and the usual Lloyd hi-jinks. Ron Carter is our organist.

This series closes out with Buster Keaton again, except this time alongside Fatty Arbuckle starring in “*Coney Island*”. Keaton plays a cop and Eddie Hulseley accompanies.

One thing I like about these period motion pictures is how they capture some of daily life and scenery of the 1920’s, such as Coney Island 100 years ago. The plot involves the pursuit of the fairer gender and just a bit of cross dressing, only when necessary to carry the plot forward. We’ll all get more information on the 22nd.



Come early and hear our Pre-show Organist, Jay Mitchell. **Members attend FREE.** But when arriving, you need to check in at the “will-call table” where you will be expected. The will-call table is at the front doors to the left of the box office. If you have a Chapter name tag, please wear it.

Brady Born

CLOSING CHORD: IN MEMORY OF PHILLIP EUGENE ALLEN

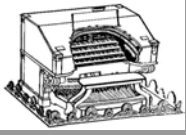
Former Chapter Vice President for 2009, Phillip Allen age 68, passed away unexpectedly on December 26 while at home. An accomplished musician, Phillip served as the orchestra director, pianist, and organist at a number of churches in the Atlanta area including First Baptist of Atlanta, Roswell Street Baptist of Marietta, Peachtree Corners Baptist, Due West United Methodist, Johnson Ferry Baptist, and First Baptist of Marietta. Recently, he was the organist at First Baptist Jonesboro, the Sons of Jubal, and as the Music Director of the Southern Winds Concert Band.



Phillip was a prolific composer/arranger with over 4,000 titles under his name. In addition to the numerous charts in use by church musicians worldwide, he also enjoyed composing/arranging for the commercial market including the score and orchestration for *The Boy King*, which won a Peabody award, the 1985 theme song for the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, and *The Dream*, an original theme song used to promote and procure the Atlanta's 1996 Olympic bid.

On a more personal note with an introduction by James Thrower, I met Phillip at a Chapter meeting in the early 2000's and then again when he accompanied a silent film at Atlanta's First Baptist Church. Phillip was also one of my Strand pre-show organists and he and Mandy were very supportive of the Save the Strand campaign, the installation of the Strand's GWIV Theatre organ and they even donated a half dozen rope lights to decorate the edges of the organ lift. Donna and I have great memories of being with Phillip and Mandy at meals and various events. He was such a positive person and hard worker for the chapter. His laugh was contagious. He and I would talk at least every other month just to catch up.

James Thrower told me a story of Phillip's involvement with Saving the Fox during the 70's. Phillip volunteered to help clean and work at the FOX. The volunteers were having a hard time reaching something on the edge and close to the bottom on the outside of the balcony. Phillip, being much lighter as a young guy, volunteered to be lowered over the balcony just being held by his feet and legs! Fortunately, no one let go and he got the job done!!



Donna and I attended Phillip's Celebration of Life Service at Johnson Ferry Baptist on January 29th. It was attended by over 400 people. The music was fantastic with a 40 voice men's chorus, a 10 piece orchestra, huge five manual Walker Organ and concert grand piano. So many musicians and singers in the auditorium raising their voices was awe inspiring! One special song that Phillip had composed was sung by the men's chorus and with all of the instruments. This was a wonderful tribute to a musician's musician. Of great interest to organists in the audience was this comment from the Senior Pastor Smith of Johnson's Ferry during his remarks. He spoke that both his mom and grandmother were church organists and he knew about the stops on an organ. He said that Phillip's life was like an organ. Starting soft and now he's pulled out all of the stops in the heavens! Rest in peace my friend and Keep the Music Playing!



Ron Carter

WHAT'S IN STORE FOR ACATOS

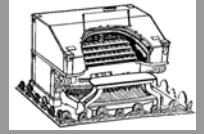
We will gather at the Earl and Rachel Smith Strand Theatre on the square in Marietta for our February meeting, which will feature the "Four Film Players" - Ron Carter, Larry Davis, Eddie Hulsey and Ken Double - along with pre-show music by Jay Mitchell, in another enjoyable afternoon at the Strand. Our chapter members attend this event at no charge.

On Sunday afternoon, March 22nd, we will head up to the Allen Organ Studios where Jeff Ayers will host the chapter at 3:00 PM. Jeff has a lovely Allen GW319 plus his usual assortment of wonderful classical organs, and we will have details on that meeting in the next newsletter.

The studio is located at 3321 Chamblee-Dunwoody Rd on Atlanta's northeast side.

We do have some excellent programs in store, including artists such as:

- the great Richard Hills performing on the Grande Page Saturday July 25th
- the return of the fabulous Barry Baker, date and location TBA
- Connecticut's Juan Cardona making his first appearance for the chapter
- and the return of the Hamm-O-Rama, a Hammond organ experience.



Lots to look forward to in the coming months of 2026 for members and guests of ACATOS!

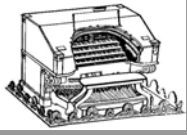
Ken Double
Vice President

ATOS CHAPTER MEETINGS AND EVENTS

February 22, 2026 Sunday at 3:00 PM	Four Silent Comedy Shorts at the Strand Theatre	Buster Keaton's COPS , Organist, Ken Double Harold Lloyd's FROM HAND TO MOUTH , Organist, Larry Davis Harold Lloyd's GET OUT AND GET UNDER , Organist, Ron Carter Buster Keaton's CONEY ISLAND , Organist, Eddie Hulsey Pre-show Organist, Jay Mitchell
March 22, 2026 Sunday at 3:00 PM	Allen Organ Studios	3321 Chamblee-Dunwoody R.
July 25, 2026 Saturday at 3:00 PM		Richard Hills on the Grande Page at Stephenson HS

STRAND THEATRE EVENTS

Sunday, February 8	To Kill a Mockingbird (1962)	3:00 PM, Pre-show Organist at 2:30 PM, Jay Mitchell
Thursday, February 12	Pretty Woman (1990)	7:00 PM, Pre-show Organist at 6:30 PM, Randy Elkins
Saturday, February 14	Casablanca (1942)	3:00 PM, Pre-show Organist at 2:30 PM, Ken Double 8:00 PM, Pre-show Organist at 7:30 PM, Larry Davis
Saturday, February 14	Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975)	11:59 PM, Pre-show Organist at 11:30 PM, Misha Stefanek NOTE that this film is technically at midnight on Feb 15
Thursday, February 19	The Princess and the Frog (2009)	8:00 PM, Pre-show Organist at 7:30 PM, Misha Stefanek 7:00 PM, Pre-show Organist at 6:30 PM, Randy Elkins
Saturday, February 21	The Body Guard (2009)	8:00 PM, Pre-show Organist at 7:20 PM, Larry Davis NOTE that the organ preshow starts 10 min early, 7:20 PM
February 22, 2026 Sunday at 3:00 PM	Four Silent Comedy Shorts at the Strand Theatre	See the ACATOS events above for titles and organists



A Letter from your Editor:

I was among the Atlanta Chapter members who traveled to Birmingham on Sunday. I was privileged to travel with Ralph Daniel who has had a lot of interesting organ experiences. I hope to persuade him to contribute an article for a future newsletter. In my distant past, it has been observed that I seldom used one word where ten would do just as well. Well, I am your reviewer for the concert and the article ran almost three pages when finished. So I removed all the miscellaneous non-performance information and put it HERE. Enjoy.

The concert began with a short synopsis of Bertha's origin story told by Gary Jones. The Alabama Wurlitzer was purchased and installed around 1932 for the purpose of accompanying silent films. Shortly after the theater was built and the organ installed, silent films became "not so silent anymore", his words. Bertha's work became relegated to concert work, sing-alongs, and basically what we all use these instruments for today.

Throughout the years the organ was well maintained and even enlarged. Around 2024, however, the console needed to be overhauled and modernized. The cabinet was freshened and the original pneumatic stop & combination action was replaced with a modern digital relay.

While this work was taking place (at Schlueter Pipe Organs in Lithonia) the Alabama Chapter had a problem. They had many events booked, and an organ with no brain. They came up with the console which we experienced today, pictured to the right. The cabinet shell is the Robert Morton 3-manual from the Aztec Theater in San Antonio, Texas. The keyboards are the Wurlitzer keyboards that were part of George Wright's studio organ, made available when a fire destroyed much of that installation. A uniflex relay system was easily adapted to it. Stuart Thompson created the new stop tabs using a router. Because the console was such a hodge-podge of components, they nicknamed it Frankenstein, or "Frankie" for short.



The idea for this DUO concert appeared when the realization came that they had the ability to connect BOTH consoles simultaneously to ONE organ. If any of you have had confusion as to what part is the organ and what is the console, this should clear that up, once and for all.

I am sure that our regular writers will contribute more of the content NEXT TIME. Something to look forward to, correct?

Brady Born