

**JANUARY PROGRAM - AVAKIAN ADVENTURE IN ALABAMA,
SUNDAY JANUARY 22, 2017, 2 PM CENTRAL TIME**

Our January meeting takes us to Birmingham, Alabama, to the Alabama Theatre, the Showplace of the South, for a very special program on the Mighty Wurlitzer featuring young artist Nathan Avakian. No other theatre organ artist exceeds Nathan in being *Outside the Box* with respect to his creative musical ideas. The title of his first album accurately describes the Avakian experience. He first appeared in concert for our chapter several years ago at Bucky Reddish's home with his teacher Donna Parker, and later performed for us during the 2013 ATOS Convention Encore on the Barton Organ at the Grand Theatre, Fitzgerald, and he is featured on the *Here With the Wind*, the Convention CD. After his performance at the Grand, he sold every one of the CD's he had brought with him, so popular was his program.

The Concert

The concert will be held at the Alabama Theatre, 1817 Third Avenue North, Birmingham, AL, at 2 PM, Central Time. Directions to the Alabama appear elsewhere in this newsletter. This is a ticketed event (\$14) but if you are a member of the Atlanta Chapter **and your dues are paid for the year 2017**, admission will be handled by our chapter. If you bring a guest, tickets are available at the theatre on the day of the show.

The theatre will be open an hour before the show starts so arrive early and see the theatre, especially if you have not had that opportunity before.

If you are planning to attend, be sure you have remitted your 2017 dues to Treasurer Rick McGee and notify Larry Davis at acatos@earthlink.net or by phone

and I will include your name on a special admissions list for the event.



The Artist

Nathan Avakian is a multi-talented artist with specialized interests and experience in organ performance, musical arrangement and composition, and lighting design.

His fascination with the theatre organ began at age four with a visit to the Portland Organ Grinder Restaurant. He began formal organ studies with Donna Parker at age eleven and has also been frequently coached by Jonas Nordwall. Since winning the American Theatre Organ Society Young Organist Competition in 2009, Nathan has provided theatre organ entertainment across the United States and internationally. In 2011, he released his first album, *Outside The Box*, featuring both theatre and classical pipe organs as well as virtual orchestrations.

Renowned for his tasteful blending of twenty-first century virtual instrument technology with theatre organ music, Nathan creates performances that satisfy contemporary musical tastes and pay tribute to the historical legacy of the theatre organ. He was commissioned to compose seven original theatre organ soundtracks for the International Youth Silent Film Festival, a

program that challenges young filmmakers to create contemporary silent films to theatre organ music. He helped pioneer the festival's expansion which now includes regional festivals in Oregon, Missouri, Adelaide and Melbourne, Australia.

Nathan served as the Youth Representative on the American Theatre Organ Society Board of Directors from 2011-2013. . In 2014 Nathan received a B.F.A. degree in lighting design from Purchase College, State University of New York. He is currently based in New York City where he works as a freelance lighting designer and design associate with organizations including Historic Hudson Valley, Princeton University, New York Stage and Film, CAP21 Theatre Company, Purchase Opera, and the Lighting Design Group.



The Mighty Wurlitzer

(Adapted from an article by Larry Donaldson) Wurlitzer Opus 1783, Style Publix 1 (also known as a Crawford Special) was shipped from the Wurlitzer factory on November 11, 1927, heading for the Alabama Theatre in Birmingham. It premiered to the Birmingham public on December 26. Like all other Publix 1, it contained 20 ranks of pipes, eight

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**Atlanta Chapter,
American Theatre Organ Society**

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*AC/ATOS is recognized as a tax-exempt organization under
Section 501.c.3 of the Internal Revenue Code.*

Chapter President - Larry Davis
Vice President - Tim Stephens
Treasurer - Rick McGee
Secretary - Ted Barnett
Newsletter Editor - Elbert Fields
Chapter Correspondent - Larry Davis

*Ads or announcements for this newsletter:
Contact Elbert Fields at 770-435-7340 or
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January Program
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sets of tuned percussion, and 4 manuals. Unlike most others of this style, it was installed in three chambers instead of the normal two. The chambers are: Solo, Main (marked Upper Main), and String (marked Lower Main). The organ was used regularly for movie overtures into 1954. The organ was occasionally used for Wednesday Ladies Shoppers Matinees and other non-movie events until the mid-1960's when the South-eastern Chapter, ATOS, began the

restoration. Starting in 1969, a group of local enthusiasts continued the work, while the organ was occasionally used for movie overtures. In February, 1973, the Alabama Chapter of ATOS was formed, and the restoration and maintenance since that time has been done by Alabama Chapter ATOS personnel, with Larry Donaldson overseeing all work. The first expansion was the addition of an English Post Horn

On opening night, the ranks in the String chamber were: Dulciana, Solo String #1, Viol d'Orchestre, Viol Celeste, and Vox Humana. The Chrysoglott and Bird Whistle are also in this chamber. Most organists found this location for the Solo String to be overpowering so a Skinner Solo Gamba replaced this rank. The Solo String #1 was later installed as a celeste to Solo String #2 in the Solo Chamber. The Gamba has been extended to 16' by the addition of a wood Violone (Austin, 12 pipes). Two additional ranks have been added to the String Chamber: Gamba Celeste (Skinner) and Unda Maris (Wurlitzer). A large scale Orchestral Chime and a Chinese Gong have also been added. The Main Chamber is the largest chamber in depth, located above the String Chamber. It originally housed only five ranks: Clarinet, Concert Flute, Tibia Clausa, Diaphonic Diapason, and Tuba Horn. The Tuba and Diapason share one regulator and tremulant as expected. Three

additional ranks were added: Flute Celeste (Wurlitzer Concert Flute) and Trombone (Moller from Loew's Temple Theatre), and a Musette. A Wind Chime has also been added just outside the swell shades. The Solo Chamber is oddly shaped with three fire escape tunnels going through its space. There are two sets of swell shades, one above the other. The original two five rank chests are stacked with the Vox Humana. brass Trumpet, Solo String #2, Tibia Clausa, and Tuba Mirabilis, Kinura, Ocestral Oboe, Quintadena, Oboe Horn, and brass Saxophone. Because of the chamber's odd shape, Wurlitzer did not center the manual chests with the swells. In fact, the remnants of a structural concrete covered steel beam that had to be removed before Wurlitzer could set the Solo chests can be seen on either side of the upper chest. A wood Harmonic Flute, Trivo English Post Horn, 16' Ophicleide, 16' metal Diaphone, Lieblich Flute (Austin) and a Horn Diapason (Kimball). The Oboe Horn has been moved to the Solo side as well as the String previously noted. The entire organ operates through a Uniflex 5000 relay.

The organ, affectionately known as "Big Bertha," has been recorded by such artists as Don Baker, Jim Riggs, Tom Hazleton, and Jelani Eddington.

Directions to the Alabama Theatre (1817 Third Avenue North, Birmingham, AL)

Traveling to the Alabama Theatre is easy and straightforward, even if you don't have a GPS. Take I-20 West out of Atlanta in the direction of Birmingham. After you cross the Georgia/Alabama line, continue west exactly 90 miles to Exit 125 (same mile marker number). Just five miles earlier, at mile marker 130, you will have merged with I-59 (which, like 75/85 here, run together through downtown). AT EXIT 125, EXIT LEFT FROM THE FAST LANE. At the bottom of the ramp, you will TURN LEFT ONTO 22nd STREET (one-way street). Continue south for eight blocks and TURN RIGHT ON SECOND AVENUE. (one-way street) Travel west for four blocks and TURN RIGHT ONTO 18th STREET (one-way street). Halfway down the block, the rear of the Alabama Theatre will be on your right. Street parking on 18th Street and on 3rd Avenue (one-way street) is free on the weekend and there are for-pay lots at 18th St and 2nd Ave, and at 3rd Ave and 19th St. *Do not park in the McWane Science Center Parking Deck.* Allow 2½ - 3 hours for your trip, but remember that you gain an hour when you cross into the Central Time Zone at the Alabama border.

Returning to Atlanta, take 3rd Avenue east (one-way street.) and follow the signs to I-20/I-59. 3rd Avenue dead ends into 26th Street (two-way). Turn left and take the ramp immediately to the right that will take you to I-20 East and HOME!!

President's Message



And so a new year begins and I am sure it will find us in "all the old familiar places," Stephenson High, the Strand, the Marietta Performing Arts Center, the Fox, the Rylander, the Tivoli, the Grand, the homes of many chapter members, and who knows where else. I believe it will be as exciting and productive a year as was 2016.

And for this upcoming year, at the December chapter meeting, the officers and board were elected. You can find the list below, but we welcome in particular Tim Stephens back to the executive as Vice-President and Ted Barnett as our new Secretary. The only addition voted on at the meeting was to include Mr. Ken Double on the Board. I thought he had cunningly slipped away when he stepped down from the vice-presidency but he had not intended to

do so; I had just forgotten to include him in the list. We are always glad to have his wisdom and experience helping us as we move along.

But that's not all that happened in December at the chapter meeting. In fact, voting occupied just a short few moments. The rest of the time was spent, eating, listening to stories (I had a particularly delightful time with a couple of members from whom I hope we will be hearing more very soon), and listening to music. The TO-5 was ably played by all of the usual suspects, including our host, Mr. McGee, and by Mr. Double who had returned just in time from an engagement at the Fox Theatre. But there were many others, including a surprise from new, or rather renewed, member Bill Thompson, from whom we expect to be hearing more now that he has joined us. We had several other new guests who learned that we are all about enjoying the music, friendship, food and fun.

To conclude, I'll just say that the danger of making a list of any kind is that no matter how diligent you are or how many times you review your list, you may inadvertently omit someone. And I did so in my December message when I did not include the name of Dale Parrott in the list of those we lost. If you look back, you'll find my remarks on Dale in an earlier issue but he certainly should have been a part of that end-of-year retrospective. A faithful member, a great musician, a willing host, a good friend and generous heart – that made him a perfect and a valued member of our chapter - an example of what we value most in our members - and I remember him, like the others, with joy and sadness both.

And with those memories and in the same spirit, let us meet the challenges and opportunities of the new year.

Larry Davis

In accordance with the chapter by-laws the Board of Directors submitted the following nominations for officers and board members for the year 2017. As per those bylaws, notice was distributed at the November meeting. The by-laws provide that further nominations should be submitted to the Secretary (Randy Cobb) no later than two weeks prior to the annual business meeting on December but since that meeting was held earlier in the month, the time frame was extended until one week before the election (December 4) so that those receiving notice via the newsletter would have an opportunity to participate in the nominating process. The annual business meeting was held at the December chapter meeting at Rick McGee's home at 3 pm on December 11 and the following were elected:

PRESIDENT – Larry Davis
 VICE-PRESIDENT – Tim Stephens
 SECRETARY – Ted Barnett
 TREASURER – Rick McGee
 NEWSLETTER EDITOR – Elbert Fields
 PAGE PROJECT CHAIR— Jack Sandow

STRAND PROJECT CHAIR – Ron Carter
 MEMBERS-AT-LARGE:
 Lee Lanier , Randy Hendry, Mike Hutcherson,
 Bob Fountain, John Tanner, Ken Double

Information for Your Alabama Trip

Food – on the way over, you will find good restaurants in Alabama at Exit 188 (Oxford), or in Birmingham itself. You will find plenty of fast food places at Oxford at both exits, 188 and 185. You will also find fast food at exits 158 (Pell City) and 144 (Leeds/Moody).

Fuel – The Pilot at Exit 165 (Lincoln/Embry) is reliably the lowest priced fuel on the Atlanta/Birmingham route. Occasionally there may be other outlets a cent cheaper but access to and from the Pilot is easy.

Organist Biography: Part Two

By John Tanner



MR. GEORGE PERFECT.

GEORGE PERFECT: Atlanta's First Theatre Organist Or First Organist in an Atlanta Theatre

George E. Perfect, was born January 19, 1887 in Harrow, Greater London, England. Shortly afterwards his family came to the United States and settled in Chicago. George became a citizen in 1898.



The Atlanta Alcazar, "Kings of the Forest" Day.

In April of 1909 the Alcazar Theatre "The Theatre Beautiful" opened at 99 Peachtree Street in Atlanta. One of the features of the new theatre was the \$5000 dollar pipe

organ, which in reality was not a pipe organ but a large Mason and Hamlin Reed organ.

George Perfect was engaged as organist and pianist and later would become music director. Although George did not play on a "theatre organ." the musical selections that he played on the Mason and Hamlin reed organ would set the style on the types of music that would later be played on a theatre organ.

The following three articles from April and May of 1909 showed the musical versatility of Mr. Perfect.

"George Perfect the organist and pianist by turns, showed himself a musician as good as the best and moreover that he lacked no experience in the business of fitting harmony to the lighting changes of a live moving picture show. He was there on the spot every time. People on the inside of the business admired him for that, and the general public was full of praise for his music. The organ bade the audience good-bye and ushered the newcomers in." Atlanta Georgian April 22, 1909

"Atlantans are to be given a musical treat at the Alcazar, Theatre Beautiful, all next week. At each performance, as a pipe organ solo, Mr. George Perfect will play Verdi's most popular opera, "Il Trevatore." The Alcazar audiences of last week were delighted with Mr. Perfect's rendition of the famous sextet from "Lucia." So well was this received that Mr. Perfect has decided to put on as a special musical feature from time to time, the best of the grand operas and other famous compositions."

Atlanta Georgian May 14, 1909

"George Perfect, the accomplished musical director at the Alcazar, Theatre Beautiful, who has pleased thousands by his wonderful comprehensions of music and thorough technique, has set local musicians talking by performing the

difficult and unusual feat of playing rag-time on a pipe organ. Few pipe organs "speak" quick enough to permit of quick music. The large one at the Alcazar, however, has a double set of air tubes, connecting the keys with the reeds, and it responds as promptly as a piano. Mr. Perfect's classical selections on the organ have been the talk of the city."

Atlanta Georgian May 10, 1909

From these three articles we see all the attributes that would make a successful theatre organist during the nineteen twenties and beyond, by being able to play operatic music, popular music, and able to accompany a silent film. George Perfect was playing that way almost ten years before and on a reed organ no less.

In December of 1911, the "New" Vaudeville Theatre opened, in Atlanta down on Whitehall Street. George left the Alcazar to become the pianist at the Vaudeville.

In 1914, George left Atlanta to go to Dallas, Texas to become the organist at the Old Mill Theatre. For the rest of his career George would play the organ in many of the Dallas theatres well into the late nineteen thirties. These theatres would include the Old Mill, Capitol, Ideal, Majestic, and the Melrose.

On December 12, 1939, George Perfect would pass away after suffering a heart attack and is buried in Sparkman Hillcrest Memorial Park in Dallas, Texas.

Although George Perfect is mostly forgotten we can see by his playing here in Atlanta, that he was one of the early pioneers in the art of playing the theatre organ.

Upcoming Meetings & Events *(Mark your Calendars)*

- **January 22, 2017, 2 PM** - For our January meeting, we will be joining the Alabama Chapter as the present international young artist Nathan Avakian and his unique musical styling on the Mighty Wurlitzer of the Alabama Theatre. This is a ticketed event but the chapter will be covering the cost of the tickets for our members.
- **Sunday, January 29, 3 PM, McGee Residence - Board of Directors Meeting (all welcome)**
- **Sunday, February 12, 2 PM CST, Garner Residence, Jackson, MS, Magnolia TOS** with Larry Davis at the Robert Morton organ
- **Sunday, February 19, 2017 at 2:00 pm CST. Free admission *John McCall in Concert at the Fred Dove Residence***, Warrior Alabama. This concert on Dove's Walker Theatre Organ is sponsored by the Alabama Chapter, ATOS. *Contact the artist at jcmcdc@windstream.net for further information.*
- ***Please see the below information about a Mel Brooks January Friday night movies*** series with organ preshows 30 minutes prior to show time at the Strand. Just got this info. Organists TBA.
 - January 6 8 pm SPACEBALLS
 - January 13 8 pm BLAZING SADDLES
 - January 20 8 pm YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN
 - January 27th 8pm ROBIN HOOD: MEN IN TIGHTS
- ***I's Out!*** John McCall has recorded a new tribute to the big band era on the Forker Memorial Wurlitzer, Grace Church, Sarasota. The CD, entitled ***Calling Mr. Miller*** is available through E-Bay or from the artist at jcmcdc@windstream.net (229) 560-7540.

CHURCH ORGANIST/PIANIST wanted for the music program at Rabun Gap Presbyterian Church. Must be a committed Christian and accomplished accompanist to play for traditional services and choir practice. Contact Rev. Don Barber, 706.746.2020 or send resume to:
P.O. Box 333, Rabun Gap, Ga. 30568.

Dear ATOS,

I wanted to be sure the members of the ATOS were aware there had been an article in the 12/05/16 issue of the Savannah Morning News, written by Katie Nussbaum, about a proposed new event facility being planned for River Street in Savannah, called Plant Riverside West.

Hotelier Richard Kessler plans to build a \$270 million facility with restaurants and ballrooms centered by a JW Marriott, which will have an 1,100 foot long plaza where people can sit and dine, and be entertained for several hours a day by a new PIPE ORGAN.

The facility is scheduled to open within two years.

Yours,

Andy Thompson