

# ATOS Atlanta

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



## Here Come The Kids! Summer Youth Adventure

Ten years ago, the American Theatre Organ Society launched what was called The Summer Youth Adventure (SYA). This much-talked about experiment began with a dozen or so young people attending a camp-like week-long environment in the Chicago area. Instructors Jonas Nordwall, Donna Parker, and Jelani Eddington headed the teaching staff. And the experiment was a spectacular success.

Now in Year 11, the SYA is coming to Atlanta. Those three instructors have been joined by Martin Ellis and Christian Elliott as a five-person core teaching group, usually assisted by one add-on. Ken Double will fill that role in Atlanta.

What has made the SYA so successful? Skilled teaching in a fun atmosphere on great instruments. And the roster of graduates is dotted with



**Chester and Lester  
are so excited to  
have more kids  
involved in ATOS!***is*

great talent headlining concerts and conventions. Nathan Avakian, Justin LaVoie, Donnie Rankin, Dan Minervini – these are a few of the SYA graduates.

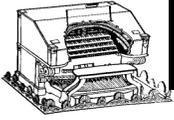
The program has also helped revive the Young Theatre Organist Competition held annually during ATOS conventions.

This year, our Page organ will be the primary teaching

instrument, with trips to the Fox Theatre, the Alabama Theatre, and a stop at the Burud residence providing the young players opportunities to play all kinds of organs.

More importantly, the six brand new attendees this year in Atlanta bring the total to more than 80 attendees in 10 years. Young people – perhaps our most precious asset – coming together to learn to play the theatre organ. Social media has kept them in touch, forming now-life-long friendships. And ATOS is far better for having the foresight to establish this program, and then help provide the funding to make it possible.

Friday night at Stephenson HS, July 20 at 7 p.m., this year's SYA will conclude with the students' concert program, and we are invited to attend.



A LETTER FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

Greetings from Southern California!



I write to you following the ATOS Convention, hosted by the Los Angeles Chapter, and a thrilling week of spectacular concerts on fantastic theatre organs. It gets the fires stoked for our own efforts coming in 2020 here in Atlanta, when we will again host the ATOS Annual Convention.

If a Richard Hills performance does not inspire and reconfirm why we worked so hard to install the Page and then caress that pipework to its full potential, then I am not sure what would provide that inspiration. His brilliant concert was superb in every way, and we now look forward to working with the Stephenson High School officials to confirm two dates for concerts this Fall, and in the Spring of 2019.

Ted Barnett is doing wondrous things with our newsletter, including the calendar of events for July, August and beyond, which I invite you to peruse, and then transfer to your own calendars. Of note, the ATOS Summer Youth Adventure (SYA) which brings some 15 young people to the Atlanta area for a week of intense theatre organ training. Friday night, July 20, at 7 p.m., ACATOS chapter members are invited to Stephenson High School to hear the SYA's final event, a performance of one song from each of the participants. I hope you can be there to witness in person the invigorating thrill of all these YOUNG PEOPLE PLAYING THEATRE ORGAN!!

If you have ideas, comments, suggestions, we are all ears. My email address is: [kdatos52@yahoo.com](mailto:kdatos52@yahoo.com). I would be delighted to hear from you. And here is a midyear "Call to Serve!" Come October, we will be actively seeking those who might wish to serve on the ACATOS Board, or assist with a specific project. Step up!! Our chapter is only as good as those who make it that way. Don't be bashful!!

Ken Double



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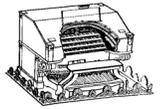
[www.facebook.com/ATOSAtlanta](https://www.facebook.com/ATOSAtlanta)

ACATOS is recognized as a tax-exempt organization under Section 501.c.3 of the Internal Revenue Code.

- Chapter President - Ken Double
- Vice President - Larry Davis
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- Secretary - Bill Thompson
- Newsletter Editor - Ted Barnett
- Chapter Correspondent - Larry Davis

- Strand Project – Ron Carter
- Page Project – Jack Sandow





## Pond Hopping Around a Mountain of Stone !!



Saturday, June 23rd, 2018, at 4:00 P.M, the folks came from near and far for a special treat – the return of Richard Hills to Stephenson High School and the Grande Page organ !!

“I Like America!” This selection by Noel Coward brought the console and artist into view of the audience and at the conclusion, our English visitor stated this was his feeling for the day and for us !! Next, a great medley of tunes from a show often overlooked – “Hans Christian Andersen” from the pen of Frank Loesser. This show had a number of memorable selections. And now, a composer from across the pond - Felton Rapley. We were treated to a very smooth ballad titled “Serenade to Moonlight” and the Page cast its moonglow on all in the room! While across the pond, we were given a “Midnight in Mayfair,” a Lowell Chase piano novelty – and a typically energetic English novelty style – much energy and technical dexterity – and the artist and instrument worked as a fine-tuned team !! Now, back home

(sort of) and to the mind of Frank Churchill – a Disney composer and a medley of selections from his film score for “Snow White.” You don’t get to hear these as a group often – and many fond childhood memories came tumbling back !! To round out the first half and take us to INTERVAL, we travelled on the pen of British composer Roald Hammer “Viva Mexico - a Mexican Fantasy.” Energy, Rhythm, Percussions, Traps, Tacos, er maybe not, but a great piece to display the stylistic range of the Grande Page !!

### INTERVAL

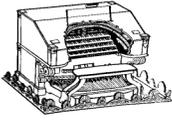
The English are coming – the English are coming – and we are happy for this. “Hooray for Hollywood” shared the opening spot with “Rule Britannia!” and got us off to a fine start for the second half of the show. Composer Burton Lane left us a great score with very memorable tunes for his show, “Finnian’s Rainbow” and we were given a first-class treatment of these – many moods, tempos, and a great sense for the feel of the show. Imagine, 1968 and Fred Astaire and Petula Clark together !! Traveling back across the pond, we entered the world of Jimmy Leech (Leach ?), a part of a group known as the Organolians. His composition, “Smash and Grab” gave us a taste of the rapid-fire English novelty – and the Page proved it could keep up just fine !! Returning home again, we were treated

to a trio of selections from the great pen of Hoagy Carmichael – “Two Sleepy People,” “Skylark,” and “My Resistance Is Low.” The latter one even being a hit in the UK !! To close the show, a fondly remembered tune of Malich Sherwin – from 1932 – “A Nightingale Sang In Barkley Square” hit all the right mood buttons and the Page sang for us !! After a mention of thanks to parties-that-be, a rousing tribute to the Master Showman - Al Jolson and songs of the 1920s’ and 1930s’- including “Mammy,” “When the Red Red Robin Goes Bob-Bob-Bobbing Along,” “Always,” “Toot Toot Tootsie, Goodbye” and others had the audience on its collective feet and begging for more.

We WERE given more – a rip-snorter offering of “12th Street Rag” and Richard’s hands only left his arms on two occasions!!!



Jack Sandow and Richard Hills at Page console



### The British Are Coming... Review of Richard Hill's concert on Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Auditorium Austin Organ

And now they've gone, and left us musically the better for having been here! Richard Hill's amazing program on the Grande Page will be covered elsewhere. All I can say about that is "WOW"!! Instead, we travel north to Chattanooga, where on Tuesday evening, June 26, Richard displayed his (largely) more classical side as he put the 4/92? Austin from the 20's through its paces. The organ, in its original home – Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Auditorium – sounded better than I've ever heard it. The most engaged and enthusiastic audience recognized immediately they were in for something special, despite the inherently somber event to honor veterans of all the services – and those who have gone on.

In his opening remarks, Richard again touched on the inherent irony of having a Brit (his word) play a patriotic program in America! Despite that, he played the appropriate songs for each branch of the service as their colors – and veterans – were presented and recognized. Soprano Sara Snider Schone, accompanied by Richard, sang a spirited *Star Spangled Banner*, and later on *God Bless America*, with a repeat of the chorus with the audience singing along – and heartily.

The program, not surprisingly, showed off all aspects of the organ, including tonal percussions, and he played, among other things such as an Elgar-like march in the vein of *Pomp and Circumstance* and a Fats Waller medley. Ranging from sounding majestic and impressive to using registrations so delicate you had to really listen, he used the instrument's many resources to great effect.

Richard's ease with and control of any instrument – and his gift for console repartee which educates but does so without being overbearingly scholarly – served him well. Near the end of the program, the lift descended to picture level and he provided splendid accompaniment for the Buster Keaton short, *One Week* – the one with the higgledy-piggledy house and associated antics.

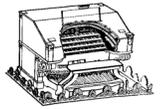
After that, Richard played a *Carmen* fantasy arranged by the last Brit to play the organ, Edwin H. Lemare, civic organist there from 1924 to 1929. (Richard said he expects to be asked back in 2107 to continue the 89-year pattern!)

People immediately sprang to their feet, and – not surprisingly – he was called back for an encore, and he really blew the dust out of the organ with *Tiger Rag*. (I

wonder if the Austin has ever been "waterfalled" to that extent!?! Who knew those Universal wind-chests could keep up!) Richard hanging onto the bench while doing the pedal solo bits garnered a wave of enthusiastic applause.

The Chattanooga Music Club – established in 1896, I believe – is to be commended for their extensive and ongoing efforts to keep the Austin not only going, but in good condition after it fell into a nearly unplayable state not so very long ago. Their word of mouth, website promotion and publicity (I believe that Richard even had a local TV interview) certainly yielded results – there were hundreds of people in attendance, many of them veterans. Yes, it was a free concert, but people donated heavily – and willingly – as I witnessed firsthand since I was working the door; people came in with their money already out!

John Alford



## George Lee Hamrick Biography Atlanta's Favorite Organist By John Tanner

Over the past several years, the Atlanta Chapter of ATOS and the Atlanta Chapter of the AGO, have held joint gatherings to share our collective musical talents. For the past two summers, the Atlanta Chapter of the ATOS hosted a portion of the AGO Pipe Organ Encounters for young organist. In both instances it was an opportunity for the young organist to listen and see up close the workings of the Page Organ at Stephenson High School. Judging from the responses of these young organist, they were most appreciative and enthusiastic about the experience.

With these recent experiences in mind, I thought it would be good to share a little biographical information on one of the past Atlanta organist that shared many ties to the organs that both organizations promote.

When pipe organs started to be installed in theaters during the nineteen hundreds, many of those organs were hardly any different than what was being installed in many religious and educational institutions. However, by the late nineteen hundreds, it was realized by many musicians and theater owners that a different kind of organ was needed to accompany silent films, but also provide for solo work, accompany, or in some cases, replace the orchestra.

Thus the theatre organ was developed and continued to evolve over the next ten or so years, when sound films, the Depression, and "music taxes" pretty much ended the need for live music in many of the nation's theatres.

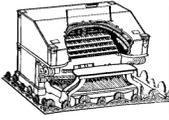
During this same period, with the thousands of organs being built for the theatres, there also a need for organist to play them. One of the Atlanta organist who seemed to do quite well at playing an organ in a theatre was George Lee Hamrick.



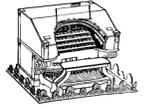
George Lee Hamrick was born on October 11, 1889 in Carrollton Georgia to the parents of James and Priscilla Hamrick. Music was such a major part of George's early life, that as teenager, he went to Rome Georgia to study with Professor Snow at Shorter College, and then went to Washington D.C. to study organ with John Bischoff, who was the eminent blind organist and composer at the First Congregational Church.

After returning to Georgia around 1910, George begins to explore the opportunities of how music could be incorporated into the exhibition of motion pictures. Soon he became the music director at the Montgomery Theatre in Atlanta. He was at the Bonita Theatre in Columbus Georgia around 1915, then by 1920, he has played at the Empire Theatre in Montgomery and at the Alcazar Theatre in Birmingham Alabama.. As well as playing the organ in the theatre, George was also a member of the New York Chapter of the American Guild of Organist and the National Association of Organist. During this decade he contributed several articles to the *American Organist*, which he discusses the methods of playing music for photo plays, and how church organist should approach playing this type of music. Since many of the church organist were now finding jobs in the growing field of musical film accompaniment, this was relevant.

Sometime in either late 1920 or early 1921, George moved to Atlanta to play the Austin organ at the Criterion Theatre. Here, he was in the employment of Sig Samuels, who was at that time building the Metropolitan Theatre. When the Metropolitan Theatre opened in July of 1921, George was appointed organist. George would play the 3 manual 25 rank Pilcher pipe organ, which at the time, was the largest pipe organ installed in a theatre in the Southeast.



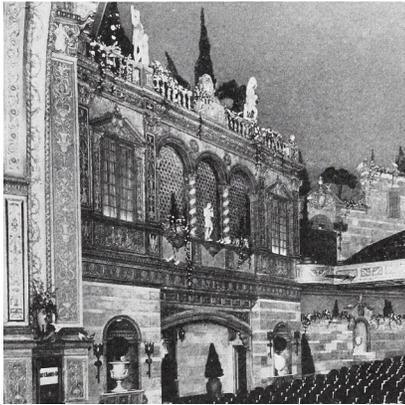
## ATOS Atlanta



### **George Lee Hamrick Biography Atlanta's Favorite Organist**

Over the next eight years, George Lee Hamrick, "Atlanta's Favorite Organist," would offer his musical skills in just about every major theater in Atlanta. These theaters would include: The Criterion, The Metropolitan, The Howard, The Georgia, Loew's Grand, and Loew's Capitol.

In September of 1925, George would be the featured guest organist at the opening of the Grand Riviera Theatre in Detroit, Michigan. There, George would preside at the 3/10 Robert Morton Orchestral Pipe Organ.



The Grand Riviera was designed by noted theatre architect John Eberson. This relatively large theatre at 2700 seats was the first theatre in Detroit designed in the "atmospheric style." Sadly, after closing in the early 1980's and sitting

empty for a number of years, was finally demolished in 1999.

During his run at the Howard, from May of 1927 to May of 1928, George was consistently given billing in the Howard Theatre ads as one of the featured attractions on the program. Usually it was "George Lee Hamrick, Atlanta's Favorite Organist" or "Hamrick at the Organ." Rarely did the ads give an indication as to what George was playing as an organ solo, but every now and then the ad would give the title of the organ solo. A couple of these are "Crazy Words, Crazy Tunes" and "It All Depends On You." Many times the organ solo would be a medley of songs such as a "Musical Recital" featuring opera and jazz numbers, and "Moon Melodies" of which all the song titles had the word "Moon" in them.

George left the Howard in May of 1928 when the

management (for a short time) adopted an all sound, all movie policy.

During the late twenties and for pretty much the rest of his life George would be a member of the Atlanta Chapter of The American Guild of Organist, serving in various positions of the chapter, including serving as Dean. He also was playing recitals in various churches in Atlanta, and the Southeast.

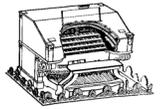
Since all the movie theatres were closed on Sunday's, this gave George the opportunity of playing the organ at Second Baptist Church where he was organist and choir director.

By 1930, George had pretty much left the field of playing the organ in the theater, and devoted most of his time over the next seventeen years as the organist and financial secretary at Atlanta's First Baptist Church, and for five years as organist for the Georgia Baptist Convention. He was also the Director of the Atlanta Philharmonic Society.

In the late 1930's a new form of an "organ" would attract George's attention and pretty soon his talents would be shared over the air waves of WSB radio, "The Voice of the South."

Around 1937, the Hammond Organ would become commercially available and would provide an economical alternative to a pipe organ for many radio stations. By 1939, WSB radio had purchased a Hammond to provide background music for many of their locally produced programs. Naturally many former theatre organist would now find new employment with radio stations, some of which had theatre pipe organs, but many that now had purchased the Hammond organ. George Lee Hamrick would be no exception and soon was employed by WSB to be their organist.

In April of 1940 George suggested to Marcus Bartlett, who the production manager at WSB was, that he would like to do a program of organ music at the midnight hour just before the station signed



## George Lee Hamrick Biography Atlanta's Favorite Organist

off for the night. The program would be an alternative to the livelier dance band type shows that the station was broadcasting earlier in the evening. The music would be restrained and mellow, with some songs, poetry, and philosophic ponderings mixed with the music. The program actually was probably patterned after the very popular "Moon River" program that was broadcast out of WLW Cincinnati. At first Mr. Bartlett was a little hesitant but soon gave the go ahead.

On April 15, 1940 "Sleepy Hollow" would take to the air from the WSB radio studio on top the Biltmore Hotel, with George Lee Hamrick at the Hammond. Elmo Ellis would serve as the narrator of the musical numbers, as well as reading poetry by various authors and poetry that he had written for the program.



For almost two years "Sleepy Hollow" was broadcast every night except Saturday, with George playing a "Hammond Concert in Miniature."

As the United States entered World War II, many key people at WSB entered into military service, one of those included "Sleepy Hollow's" narrator poet, Elmo Ellis. As the war years continued the program was broadcast several times a week, and then finally after the war was over, the program was broadcast only on Sunday nights. The final broadcast was on February 16, 1947.

After the war, Elmo Ellis would return to WSB radio along with his good friend Bob Van Camp, who would take on the duties as organist at WSB after George retired.

Although George retired in the late forties he still gave organ lessons, did concert work, and was a consultant for the Reuter Organ Company in the late 50's and early 60's

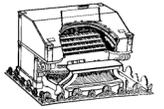
George passed away on Sept. 23, 1971

### Closing Chord

Myra Jackson, passed away June 28th. Myra and her husband Robert managed the soda fountain at Fleeman's Drug in Virginia-Highland for many years.

### Memories of Donna Winn

When the WHT Page (our Grande Page) arrived in Atlanta, it was decided to install it in Walt's warehouse at 771 Miami Circle, Atlanta, Ga. It takes less space put together than in parts. !! Donna was a very active member of the crew and performed tasks like wiring, recovering percussion mallets, and such. On one occasion, the crew went to dinner and Donna remained at the warehouse working. When we returned, Donna was nowhere to be found. Passing the blower room, we heard a small voice coming from inside the main wind trunk from the blower to the main chamber - "Don't turn on the organ! - *Don't turn on the organ!* - *Don't turn on the organ!* Donna had been working inside the trunk, sealing the inside seams with silicon. The access panel had moved to a closed position and Donna could not get it back open !!



## UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS (MARK YOUR CALENDARS)

Date	Time	Location	Description
July 20	7:00 PM	<a href="#">Stephenson High School - Stone Mountain, GA</a>	<b>Monthly Chapter Meeting</b> - we join the ATOS Summer Youth Adventure participants for the closing concert of their 2018 program on the 4/22 Grande Page organ
Sept 9	3:00 PM	<a href="#">Strand Theatre - Marietta, GA</a>	Silent Comedy Shorts - the annual presentation of classic silent shorts, all accompanied on the Mighty Allen GW-IV organ; tickets \$10, <a href="#">available here</a>
Sept 30	3:00 PM	<a href="#">Strand Theatre - Marietta, GA</a>	Silent Film - Girl Shy - Harold Lloyd's 1924 comedy, accompanied live by Ron Carter on the Mighty Allen GW-IV organ; tickets \$10, <a href="#">available here</a>
Oct 28	3:00 PM	<a href="#">Strand Theatre - Marietta, GA</a>	Silent Film - The Monster - the 1925 horror film, with accompaniment by Ron Carter on the Mighty Allen GW-IV organ; tickets \$10, <a href="#">available here</a>
Oct 28	2 PM CDT	<a href="#">Alabama Theatre - Birmingham, AL</a>	Silent Film - <i>Phantom of the Opera</i> - the tradition continues with the Theatre's 40th showing of the 1925 classic starring Lon Chaney, accompanied by Tom Helms on the 4/32 Mighty Wurlitzer; additional details to come