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# PUGET SOUND PIPELINE

Published monthly by Puget Sound Theatre Organ Society, a non-profit organization furthering the appreciation, preservation and use of the Theatre Pipe Organs of yesteryear. PSTOS is a Chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society.

Volume 15 Nos. 8-9

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2006

A Chapter of American Theatre Organ Society

Coming Sept. 23.. A return engagement by Melbourne Australia's

## John Atwell

*With an afternoon of your  
FAVORITE ORGAN POPS*

*played for you on the  
Evans 3/18 Wurlitzer*

- Refreshments
- Open console following  
the program



**JOHN ATWELL** is one of a small select group of Australian theatre organists having achieved international recognition. His programs are carefully put together, and include many types of music.

John has been playing theatre organ concerts since 1968 when he performed for the Theatre Organ Society of Australia convention. Since 1971 he has lived in Melbourne, where he pursued his science-based studies and gained a PhD in immunology in 1974. He has since enjoyed a career as a research scientist in the field of antibody engineering.

In parallel to his primary career as a research scientist, John has also been a busy performer in the music scene, playing concerts at venues both in Australia and around the world, including the USA, Canada, the United Kingdom and New Zealand. He is both a solo performer and one part of a piano/organ duo with his long-time colleague and friend, Tony Fenelon. John has visited the Pacific Northwest on several occasions, playing at Bellevue, Gig Harbor, Olympia, Salem and Wenatchee.

John is one of the house organists at the magnificently restored Regent Theatre, Melbourne, home to the Wurlitzer organ formally installed in the Granada/Paramount Theatre, San Francisco. He has played for special film performances, including the premiere of Ned Kelly and *Phantom of the Opera* and special seasons of *Gone with the Wind* and *Dr. Zhivago*.

After his program in Kenmore, John will leave for the United Kingdom where he'll play concerts on the Wurlitzers at Stockport Town Hall, near Manchester, and the State Theatre, Kilburn, London, where Sidney Torch was once resident organist.

### IMPORTANT!

**Seating limited to 50 — RESERVATIONS are IMPERATIVE!**

Reserve NOW—phone Russ or Jo Ann Evans at  
425-485-5465, or reserve by email at  
[rj.evans@verizon.net](mailto:rj.evans@verizon.net)

**ADMISSION - \$10, age 14 and under \$5**

***Includes world-class concert and refreshments.***

**Saturday, September 23, 2:00 PM**

Home of Russ & Jo Ann Evans  
6521 NE 191st ST., Kenmore  
See page 6 for drive directions.

## PUGET SOUND PIPELINE

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Puget Sound Theatre Organ Society  
6521 NE 191st ST  
Kenmore, WA 98028-3453

Puget Sound Theatre Organ Society is a non-profit organization furthering the appreciation, restoration, and use of the historic Theatre Pipe Organs of the 1920s, through education.

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Paramount Theatre—Tom Blackwell • Wash. Center—Andy Crow

### Listing of non-PSTOS events in the Pipeline

PSTOS, upon request, will list non-conflicting non-PSTOS theatre organ events in the "Other Events" column of the two Pipelines immediately preceding the event, providing Pipeline editors receive sufficient prior written notification. Venue, artist, type of event, date, and contact information will comprise the included information.

### Advertising in the Pipeline

Classified-type ads for member-owned electronic, electric, or pipe organs, and/or pipe organ parts, will be published at no charge. Please limit copy to include brief description, contact name and phone number. Prices will not be listed. Ads may be edited for content and length. Mail ad copy to address above. Other advertising is not accepted.

**Joining Puget Sound Theatre Organ Society is quick and easy!** For a one year membership, send a \$15 check payable to PSTOS together with your name(s) as you would like them to appear on your name badges, your address with complete 9-digit ZIP code, and your email address (optional) to:  
Norman Miller, Treasurer, 2644 NW Esplanade,  
Seattle, WA 98117-2527.

## PRESIDENT'S Message



What a great time we had on the August 19th Walking Tour of Historic Downtown Seattle Theatres. With the behind-the-scenes tour of three existing theatres and a wealth of information about others now gone, we gained a new appreciation of just how vibrant and active Seattle's theatre scene was in the 1920s.

This tour is an example of the new and different type of events your Programs Committee is developing. If you have other event ideas, please contact Programs Committee Chair, Barbara Graham at barbara@pstos.org. or (206) 525-7859.

Those of you who attended one or more of the Paramount's four Silent Movie Mondays in August got to see Bob Zat's great new promotional video for the Paramount's Mighty Wurlitzer Restoration Fund at the PSTOS lobby table. The video features many historic photos from the PSTOS archives, new video footage of the pipe chambers and a brief interview with House Organist Dennis James. Also new this season is a beautiful lobby table sign in gilded frame courtesy of the Paramount's media department. This sign provides information about the organ restoration effort and resulted in many interested individuals stopping by the table which was expertly staffed by Cynthia and John McFalls. At the end of each night, we met several potential new members and had cash in the donation box! Attendance at the movies averages around 1,000 so this is a great way to present information about the Paramount Wurlitzer and PSTOS.

PSTOS is working with the Paramount on a Master Restoration Plan to restore the Wurlitzer to full and reliable functioning using a combination of PSTOS volunteer labor and professional services for chamber structural repairs, pipe repairs and tonal finishing. Over \$100,000 is needed. A portion of this will come from grants, but a majority needs to come from individual donations.

In support of this plan, there will be a special fundraiser concert on Octo-

## PSTOS Coming Events

◆ **A Special BONUS EVENT— direct from Melbourne, Australia, JOHN ATWELL will wow you at the Evans Wurlitzer in Kenmore**

John has entertained PSTOSers a number of times, both solo and with Tony Fenelon at Gig Harbor. He'll visit Seattle briefly on his way to a concert tour in England. Don't miss it!

**Saturday, September 23, 2 PM**

**Coming October 8th!**

**The  
Swing Years and Beyond**  
Featuring the

**WURLITZER UNIT ORCHESTRA  
and Grand Piano**

**JONAS NORDWALL**

and

**ANDY CROW**

**in an exciting program of**

**music from the  
1930s and 1940s.**

**A Not-To-Be-Missed event!  
See page 3 for ticket information.**

ber 8th to benefit the Mighty Wurlitzer restoration fund. This program, titled: "The Swing Years and Beyond featuring the Wurlitzer Unit Orchestra," is set to coincide with the American Institute of Organ Builders (AIO) national convention being held in Seattle. Jonas Nordwall, with Andy Crow at the piano, will treat us to a variety of up-tempo jazz selections from the 1930s & '40s including music of Duke Ellington, Fats Waller, Count Basie and others. Suggested donation is \$25 and all proceeds will benefit the restoration fund. This promises to be a great event and I hope you come and bring a friend or two!

... Tom Blackwell, President

# Other NW Theatre Organ Events

## ◆ Kenyon Hall in West Seattle

Latest news can be found at:  
kenyonhall@earthlink.net or on the  
web at [www.kenyonhall.org](http://www.kenyonhall.org)

## ◆ Lincoln Theatre in Mt. Vernon

Hear the Wurlitzer every Mon/Tue at  
7PM & Fri/Sun at 5PM.

## ◆ Columbia River Organ Club

### KEN DOUBLE to perform at Salem's Elsinore Theatre

Ken is back to entertain his Pacific NW  
aficionados. He was a big hit last year  
in Bellingham. You'll love hearing him  
again!

**Sunday afternoon, Sept. 24th**

For info and latest news go to  
[www.croconline.org](http://www.croconline.org)

# From The MAILBOX

To Puget Sound Theatre Organ Society:

I have recently acquired a new Allen Q311SP Deluxe which is installed in my home. The organ was voiced by Walt Strony after which he gave an incredible recital.

I am a mediocre organist at best but love to play. I also enjoy hearing the organ played by other musicians, and extend an invitation to any organ enthusiasts who would like to come to Bainbridge Island to play or listen to the organ to please get in touch with me by phone or email.

If the Chapter has an interest in holding an event here, I would be happy to host it. My home can accommodate comfortably between 40 and 50 people. Please let me know if there is an interest.

I look forward to hearing from you and attending some of the Chapter's wonderful events.

Sincerely, Richard Duchaine  
206-842-6926 • [raduchaine@earthlink.net](mailto:raduchaine@earthlink.net)

*Editor's note: Many thanks to Mr. Duchaine for offering to host a Home Party on Bainbridge Island! What a fun event. It will be put on the the Programs Committee planning agenda for summer of 2007!*

## SAVE THIS DATE!

# The

# Swing Years and Beyond

## Featuring the WURLITZER UNIT ORCHESTRA

Under the direction of JONAS NORDWALL with special guest pianist ANDY CROW. This will be a rare treat with a variety of up-tempo music from the 1930s & '40s including tunes of Duke Ellington, Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Woody Herman and Count Basie.

Sit back and enjoy a special Sunday afternoon of sophisticated music from the great swing era, with world class theatre organist, Jonas Nordwall at the Paramount Mighty Wurlitzer pipe organ, joined by Andy Crow at the grand piano. We hope to see you there. Bring a friend or two!

**All proceeds benefit the  
Paramount Mighty Wurlitzer Restoration Fund.  
Suggested donation \$25.**

**Get your tickets now by phoning (206) 784-9203,  
or by e-mail at [tickets@pstos.org](mailto:tickets@pstos.org)**



JONAS  
NORDWALL



ANDY  
CROW

## Sunday October 8, 3:30PM

### Seattle Paramount Theatre

9th & Pine • Downtown Seattle

## INTRODUCING THE DEVELOPMENT/GRANT WRITING COMMITTEE

President Tom Blackwell reported in the January 2006 Pipeline that PSTOS has formed seven new member-run committees: Scholarship, Organ Preservation & Maintenance, Development/Grant Writing, Events & Programs, History & Archives, Volunteer Coordination, and Promotions & Media Relations. Information about the Development/Grant Writing Committee follows:

**The Development/Grant Writing  
Committee hopes to do just that.**

Our Mission Statement: "Identify and pursue grants to help fund interest in, renovation of, and, otherwise, promote theatre

pipe organs for PSTOS Members, young people, and the general public."

Our plans include developing information about PSTOS that will be available to help produce grant applications for future projects. We hope to identify and develop funding opportunities through grant programs, organizations, or promotions; and work with PSTOS Committees or other entities to establish fund raising priorities. We meet as often as necessary.

Our Committee includes Chair Barbara Graham and Members Carl Dodrill, Bob Zat, and President Tom Blackwell, ex officio member.

We encourage questions and/or input and welcome volunteers whose backgrounds may include grant writing, or volunteers who want to learn and help with our endeavor. Please contact Barbara at [barbara@pstos.org](mailto:barbara@pstos.org), or 206 525-7859.

## THE FIRST PICTURE PALACE

Reprinted from an April, 1982, *Seattle Times* article by Elizabeth Rhodes

### Oh, James Q. Clemmer was proud!

He had done it, confounding those who said he was a fool to sink \$135,000 — a king's ransom in 1912 — into what surely would turn out to be a fad: a "photoplay house" to show "moving pictures." Why, everyone knew movies never would replace vaudeville.



But Clemmer, later called "as colorful a showman as many of the early 'flickers' he showed," knew better. And on April 12, 1912, young Jim Clemmer was about to make history. He

would hold the attention of all Seattle, and maybe all of the nation, for one glittering evening.

That date, exactly 70 years ago tomorrow [April 11, 1982], was the opening of the luxurious Clemmer Theatre, 1414 Second Ave. A later *Seattle Times* article both recalled the event and put it into perspective: James Q. Clemmer, it announced, "in 1912, built what was recognized as the first theatre in the United States primarily constructed for the exhibition of motion pictures.

"This house bore his name, and for many years filled an important niche in the amusement life of the city, showing the big pictures of the day."

It seems as if Seattle always has had movie theatres, and indeed it had several before the Clemmer. Most were either remodeled storefronts or live theatres that also showed movies. The Coliseum Theatre, considered by some to be the first of the great movie palaces, opened in 1916.

That the Clemmer Theatre isn't as well remembered as the 5th Avenue, or even the now demolished Orpheum, isn't surprising, for it bore James Q. Clemmer's name for

only nine years.

Clemmer, who died in 1942, doubtless would be forgotten now, his contribution to the cultural life of this city untold, if it weren't for his nephew, Don Myers.

Myers, an architect with a love of history,



grew up hearing tales about his uncle's illustrious theatre career. "I kept thinking as a kid that they were kidding us about him building the first theatre primarily constructed for movies," Myers says.

But then he inherited a cache of priceless old photographs and newspaper clippings that, sure enough, pinpointed his uncle's place in Seattle history.

"Magnificent Picture Playhouse Finished," *The Seattle Times* announced on April 7, 1912, and then began a glowing description of the 1,200-seat premises. "The old Roman style is in vogue, plain columns set off by flaming electric torches. These torches are decidedly unique and something new in the manner of theatrical lighting in the West."

Patrons nearly mobbed the place at the opening, and photos show crowds of nattily dressed theatregoers milling about under the marquee. As Myers explains: "Back before television, the downtown was a very lively place. It was like Seattle was a big house — and downtown was the living room."

Competition for quality movies was keen, and Clemmer went all out to get the best. Among his early stars: Theda Bara, Mary Pickford, Lillian Gish — and Florence Lawrence, a pixyish young woman described at the time as "the World's Most

Famous 'Film' Actress."

In 1915, the Clemmer theatre had its greatest day. D. W. Griffith's historical saga, "The Birth of a Nation," just had been released, and Clemmer competed with other theatre owners for the right to show it. He won, and charged the princely sum of 50 cents — unheard of when most movies played for a dime — to see what was billed as the "most tremendous dramatic spectacle that the mind of man has yet produced. Three hours of gripping, appealing, blood-tlingling, soul-stirring interest, five thousand scenes, 18,000 characters, 3,000 horses."

Just in case this spectacle got to be too much, the playbill announced: "The management desires to call the attention of the ladies to the beautiful ladies' retiring room,

# Pages From The Past...continued

situated to the right of the main entrance. Maid always in attendance.”

In those days, the spectacle wasn't always the movie. During World War I, the theatre became suitably patriotic and, in 1918, held the city's first “peach-pit matinee.”

Clemmer promised free admission to each person who brought in 50 peach pits. Incongruous as it sounds, the pits were an important part of the war effort because they were used to make carbon for gas masks.

“The Clemmer Theater's peach-pit matinee yesterday resulted in 2,500 pounds of pits, washed and dried, being brought by 3,000 youngsters and adults who took the theatre by storm,” read a news account.

The patriotic patrons “spread out over the sidewalk and so blocked traffic that it was necessary to call out the police to maintain order. Seven barrels had been placed at the curb in front of the theatre, but these were filled by early in the afternoon. Dry-goods cases and crates were secured hurriedly but before they could be put in place, the vestibule was piled high with pits.”

The mess had a happy ending, however, as “the pits gathered are sufficient to make carbon for 750 gas masks, enough for three full companies of infantry.”

From early newspaper clippings, it appears that thinking up such things as peach-pit matinees was fairly typical of Jim-



Clemmer, a creative risk-taker, who began his theatrical career in 1908. Two years earlier, Clemmer's father had purchased a narrow, seven-story Pioneer Square building and turned it into the Kenneth Hotel. Jim Clemmer became the hotel's manager. But that wasn't challenge enough. With a \$6,000 bankroll, Clemmer transformed what had been an unused space on the hotel's ground floor into his first movie house, the Dream Theatre. Then in a stroke of brilliance, he put in a pipe organ and

hired a young fellow named Oliver Wallace to pump out tunes to accompany the silent films.

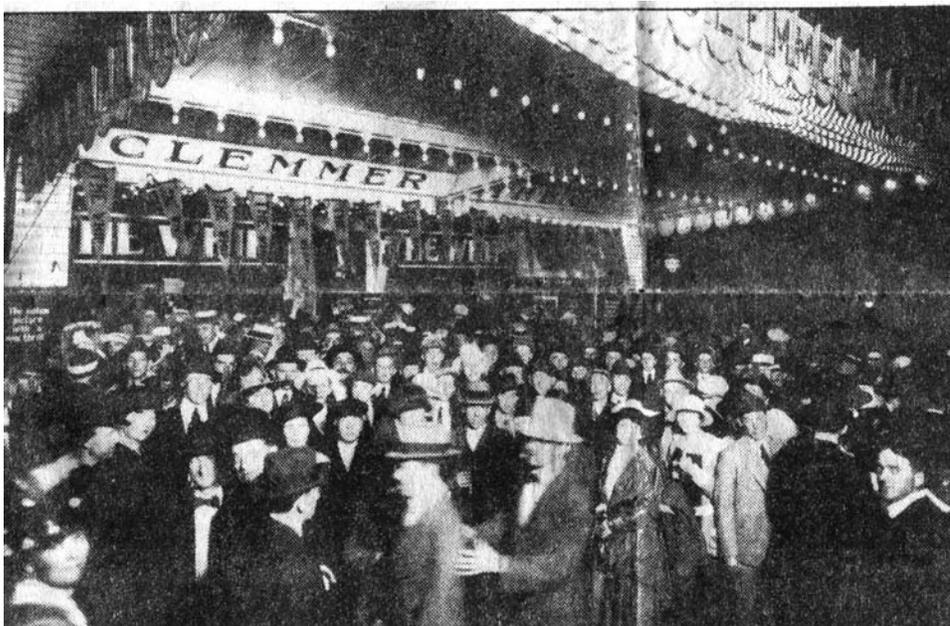
Myers believes “that was the first instance ever of using a pipe organ to accompany motion pictures. I was told by my grandmother and grandfather that theatre people from all over the country came to see and hear it.” Wallace went on to play at the Clemmer Theatre. But his real fame came when he became Walt Disney's head musical director and wrote the scores for *Lady and the Tramp*, *Cinderella*, *Dumbo* and *Peter Pan*.

Much as Clemmer liked the pipe organ, he figured his silent “flickers” would be even better if he added voices. So, in 1909, two decades before Hollywood got around to it, he did.

As he recalled in a 1929 newspaper interview, “I was showing a one-reel thriller at the time called *The Ingrate*, and I got the idea that it would be an improvement if the pictures would talk like the actors on the legitimate stage. Actors were placed directly behind the screen and spoke the lines as the film was shown. However, the subtitles showed just the same, and people thought it was distinctly amusing. The idea was a decided flop. Our talkies lasted only one week.”

The rest of the process was hardly more sophisticated.

“We had one big machine and it didn't rewind the film,” Clemmer said in 1929. “The film ran into a tank, and when it broke, which it frequently did, we had to



In those days, downtown was a lively place, drawing crowds to the new theatre. The Clemmer competed to show films with Theda Bara, Mary Pickford, Lillian Gish and other stars.

**Drive directions to the Evans home,  
6521 NE 191st St. in Kenmore**

From I-5 take EXIT #175 eastbound onto NE 145th St., drive 1.4 mi. to Bothell Way. Turn left (north) on Bothell Way, driving around the north end of the lake 3.0 mi. to 68th NE. Turn left (north) on 68th and drive 1/2 mi. to NE 190th St. Turn left (west) on NE 190th, drive one short block to NE 191st St. Turn left, drive one long block to a culdesac on the left marked Dead End, also NE 191st St. Turn left into the culdesac. The Evans home is the first on the left. Park in drive or on street, LEAVING NEIGHBORS MAILBOXES CLEAR.

From I-405 take EXIT #23 westbound toward Bothell, drive 5 miles, staying on Hwy 522, to the main light in Kenmore at 68th NE. Turn right (north), and continue as above where underlined.

If lost, phone 425-485-5465.

**PUGET SOUND THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY**

Russ & Jo Ann Evans, Newsletter Editors  
6521 NE 191st ST  
Kenmore, WA 98028-3453



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**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

**Please help save Mt Vernon's Lincoln Theatre and its Wurlitzer!**

Dear Puget Theatre Organ Society,

We need your help! I am writing to you from Mount Vernon, Washington. Our Lincoln Theatre pipe organ is featured on the PSTOS website, and like you, we are very proud of our theatre and its Wurlitzer..

Well, now it's existence is in danger. Our mayor wants to remove the building from city ownership and sell it. We need as many voices as possible to stop this from happening.

All the details are on our web site: <http://www.savethelincoln.org>

We are just getting our coalition started but the City Council could vote at any time and we could lose our theatre and organ.

Please help us in any way you can. Please email each City Councilperson, emphasizing the importance of saving this historic piece of Americana, explaining that the theatre pipe organ is one of just two American musical inventions (the other being the banjo!), that no more will ever be manufactured, and that Mt. Vernon is caretaker of one of only five remaining in Washington. Many thanks and best regards,

Brian Young, Chairman  
"Citizens To Save The Lincoln"

Contact me any time at 360-840-4961.

Contact City Council members by email at:

- Councilman Glenn Ash  
[glennash@windermere.com](mailto:glennash@windermere.com)
- Councilman John Cheney  
[cheneyjohn@comcast.net](mailto:cheneyjohn@comcast.net)
- Councilwoman Kathy Combs  
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*Thank you for your help and support!*

**THE FIRST PICTURE PALACE, continued...**



The Clemmer Theatre's beautiful "Ladies' retiring room."

hunt around in 1,000 feet of film to find the loose ends. The audiences in those days found nothing amusing in looking at our slides, which said, "Just a minute while we change reels."

Frank Myers, the Dream Theatre's projectionist in 1910, once recalled another situation. "Audiences were unsophisticated, almost unbelievably naive. One guy, really a nut, saw the same picture 15 times. It showed some early-day bathing beauties in pantaloons skipping down the beach where, as they prepared to disrobe, the director prudently had a train pass by, momentarily blocking the audience's view.

"By the time the train passed by, the bathing beauties were modestly swimming off shore. When Clemmer asked this nut why he had seen the picture 15 times. The guy replied, "Some day that train is gonna be late."

After operating the Dream Theatre and then his Clemmer Theatre, Jim Clemmer sold out, and in 1921 left for Southern California and the movie business there.

He lasted only a year.

Seattle was too much in his blood. Returning, he built the Winter Garden Theatre, 1515 Third Ave., and operated it until 1926. When Clemmer fell on hard times, he sold the Winter Garden.

Although Clemmer never was to own a theatre again, he stayed in the business, managing many of Seattle's best entertainment palaces – the 5th Avenue (he was its first manager), the Blue Mouse, the Orpheum, the Paramount and the Music Box.

When he died, his boss and friend, John Hamrick, eulogized the man who had made Seattle entertainment history. "He was the best theatre manager I ever knew," Hamrick said. "He was always on the job, looking after the convenience of his patrons, and he probably knew more of them by name than any manager in the country.

"He was a grand fellow."