



April 2010
Volume 8, Issue 07

Next Meeting
PARTY ON THE PIPES, Apr. 8 - 12

Deadline for the next newsletter is:
Last Friday of April, 2010

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NEWSLETTER	
Editor: Jim Ryan "Shutter Chatter" is published by the Saint Louis Chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society. The chapter is organized as a "not-for-profit" corporation under the statutes of the State of Missouri and is recognized as "tax-exempt" under section 501 (c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.	

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Per the President's message in the May-June 2009 issue of "Theatre Organ", recording of any concert, meeting, or open console is discouraged. If, **prior** to the event, you ask for and are granted permission by both the artist and the owner of the instrument, you may record for **your own** personal use.

No recordings are to be sold, given away, or posted on the Internet.

You may not interfere with the artist or block the view of the audience.

If you have not sent in your money for The John Ledwon Concert, please send your payment to Wallace. The extras may fill up soon. The concert is August 22nd, 2 PM, at the Lincoln Theatre.

Thanks to Sharon Theurer for being the gracious hostess for our March meeting. Thanks also to Wallace Dittrich for allowing us to use his home for the meeting. We had a great turnout and Larry Krupp did a really outstanding job playing the three manual Allen organ. It's always fun to listen to songs you remember from several decades ago!

Several of our members have been dealing with some major health issues. Please keep them in your prayers.

Jim

SHUTTER CHATTER

Saint Louis Theatre Organ Society - Saint Louis Missouri

I hope that
we see you
at
"PARTY
ON THE
PIPES"
APRIL 8th thru 12th

PARTY ON THE PIPES

Single day pricing will be the same as it was last year. There will be no single event prices.

Thursday Pre-Glow April 8 th	\$ 25.00
Friday April 9 th	\$ 75.00
Saturday April 10 th	\$ 75.00
Sunday April 11 th	\$100.00
Monday April 12 th	\$ 75.00

Upcoming Events

SLTOS MEETINGS and SPONSORED EVENTS ARE IN BOLD TYPE.
Guests are welcome

Please note that all of the upcoming months are listed. If there is no meeting information listed for that month, and you wish to host a meeting, please contact
Dennis Ammann, 618.654.7855.

April 9 – 12, PARTY ON THE PIPES

May 16th 2:00 pm Jeff Barker at Ryan's home

June 5th Annual Picnic at Carondelet Park

July 18th 2:00 pm Home of Bernie and Betty Nordmann Please remember to bring chairs!

August 15th 2:00pm Midwest Music

August 22 2:00 pm John Ledwon concert at the Lincoln Theatre

September Home of Dave & JoAnn Bartz

October 17th Dennis Rathert

November 21st SLTOS's Annual Official Meeting at the home of Pam & Richard Masching

December Annual Holiday Party at the home of Denny and Mary Lou Ammann

January 16th 2:00pm Ken and Dawn Iborg

Please note the open meeting dates and get your request in. (It doesn't have to be the third Sunday afternoon!)

NEW NAME BADGES

You should have your new name badges if Shutter Chatter is mailed to you, or if we saw you at the last meeting. We will distribute them if we see you in April or May, or at the June picnic. Then we will mail the rest out. Keep your plastic holder, as we will not be routinely distributing them.

SHUTTER CHATTER

Saint Louis Theatre Organ Society - Saint Louis Missouri

The Merry Widow Theatre By James Grebe

The Merry Widow Theatre opened in 1937 and was in two locations on Chouteau. Before this there were 2 previous Merry Widows in the same neighborhood but I cannot find their addresses. The third was at 1435 Chouteau that closed in 1942 and became a roller rink.

The Merry Widow was the only theatre in town to be equipped with a Wurlitzer "Organette". Wurlitzer Organettes were designed for small theatres with a low budget and rock bottom prices. Organettes were the next generation of "Photoplayers". From 1924 to 1937 there were 292 produced and the Merry Widow was the only theatre in town to have one. The basis of the "Organette" was a standard Wurlitzer upright piano with a 2 roll mechanism that allowed it to play continuously. While 1 roll mechanism was playing the other could be fitted with a different roll to play next. It had a standard 88 key manual on the lower and a 61 note manual above it. In the back of the piano were mounted the 2 unified ranks, a 61-note Flute and a 37 note Quintadena. Of special interest were 2 sets of swell shades on at the top and the other in back so there was a good degree of expression. The piano itself was fitted with both a guitar sound rail (felt muting strip that came between the hammers and string and a rinky-tink rail. With the interior pictures I have seen it must have been a real chore to tune, as all that dual roll mechanism was right in front of the tuning pins. There no traps of any kind as these were left off to keep the cost down. It was equipped with a small Orgablow blower for the pipes and a standard vacuum pump for the player mechanism. The piano case itself appears to be the same size and style as the piano contained in the St. Louis Fox organ. The retail price for the theatre owner was around \$3,000.00

The 4th, the New Merry Widow, opened in 1942 by the Komm circuit, at 1718 Choteau and the architect was Jack Shawcross. In 1947 there was a disastrous fire that gutted the theatre. Afterwards the theater was rebuilt and reopened. During the 1950's the manager was Bob Lawson and one of the cashiers was Pat Phelps. One of the ushers was George Clayton. The ticket takers name was Tommy. At that time, an usher made \$17 a week for 6 nights work at the Merry Widow. The ticket booth was at the center of the front of the building and the

entrance was at the right passing the concession stand as you moved towards the auditorium. The lobby was circular in shape with terrazzo flooring and right past the concession stand were steps to go to the balcony which had 3 rows of seats at either side of the projection booth, though the general public was not allowed access to the balcony. The balcony was left to people who worked there and was largely a "make out" area for couples. There were two small chandeliers that lit the auditorium over the three aisles of seats. The walls were draped and surrounded the screen. The men and women's bathrooms were to either side in the lobby. There was an older lady, of Syrian descent, who ran the concession stand with an assistant named Pat Patterson. Separating the lobby from the auditorium was a half wall with curtains keeping out the light. According to William Cummins, who served as an usher there, usher really meant "bouncer" as his main job was to break up fights and disturbances rather than usher people to and from their seats. Back in the 40's and 50's, people being thrown out of the theatre was common in the smaller theatres. The name became Merry Widow again in 1951 when "New" was dropped. Bob Lawson was the manager there during the last years of operation. Chouteau borders on the train yards to the north so there was no population there and as the neighborhood deteriorated on the south, west and east of the theatre with commercial use for the vacant land the theatre was closed just before 1960 and it then became a truck garage for a while. Later, it became the headquarters of the Hibbon Hardwood Company and the building, on the outside is still intact. The following picture is what the top of the building looks like these days.



Gerald Alexander, various members of McKinley High School alumni, and James Grebe Archives