



AMERICAN THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY

Web Site President's Message – June 25, 2007

Greetings to you Web-Site Watchers from Houston, TX!

On the eve of the Annual Convention in New York City, I am writing with a feeling of excitement and expectation, and also with some fear and trepidation.

Some of what I write here today might alarm or even anger a few of you. Be sure to read to the finish. The alarm is countered with clear thought about positive action for ATOS.

I am, by nature, an optimist. That good, Midwestern stock and upbringing allows me to think the best about people, look on the bright side (being a Chicago Cubs fan, that's a given!), and maintain a bit of a "Gee whiz, ain't life grand!" attitude.

My fear and trepidation revolves around several factors. First and foremost, our declining membership, and how we attack this and reverse this. Secondly, the basic relationship between ATOS leadership at the Board level, and our local chapters and their leadership, and how we can improve that relationship, generate activity, and thus, grow.

At the heart of Board activity in attacking these problems is the Strategic Planning Initiative (SPI). Bluntly stated, we are behind in that effort, stalled by several factors. That said, there are discussions and active programs in the incubation stage, which will have long-range and potentially very positive results for ATOS.

But the degree of positive results will be directly tied to the degree of response and activity we get from our local chapters and their leaders. The Board KNOWS there must be change and new, effective programs to help local chapters.

What specifically those programs are, and how much help they will be for the local chapter, is going to be as much a reflection on the local chapter as it is on the ATOS Board.

Soon, there will be a survey distributed to each chapter. It will involve lots of detail and will help guide the Board into the programs and areas that our chapters indicate are vital to them.

I will be curious to see what level of participation we receive from the chapters in this first, simple step. Will 50% respond? 60%? Or will it be 25-30% response to the survey?

I lay down the challenge today: success in garnering new interest in ATOS is as much a responsibility of each local chapter President and/or Chairman and its members as it is the leadership at the Board level. This Board is eager to move forward. Much of that forward movement must be dictated by and guided by the needs of our local chapters. And ATOS needs to know more specifically what is needed. Thus, Step One in SPI...a survey to find out more about you. When you receive this survey, simply respond.

We at the Board level hear the oft-asked question, “What does ATOS do for me besides send me a magazine?” There is no more irritating question asked of Board members than that, particularly a Board that spends hours and hours of volunteer time every week on the business that is ATOS.

There are, as I have stated in the past, 33 different committees at work. What does ATOS do for you? Give away money. Grants are made to chapters for organ projects, money that the Board is excited to give away to help make organs better.

Give away more money. Scholarships are provided to students preparing for careers in music. Grants are made to young players who can attend conventions and get private tutoring. In a new program this year, ATOS is organizing its first-ever Summer Youth Camp. Nearly 20 young people will have a full weekend of teaching, seminars and a concert in the Chicago area. And, local chapters are involved. CATOE, Dairyland, LATOS, JATOE, Nor-Cal, OCTOS, Puget Sound (and heaven forbid I have forgotten some) have sponsored students who now can attend this summer camp. This program will expand; and yes, we hear all you adults who are hollering, “Where’s our camp???” It needs to be done for adult players, too!

Another very important item on the “this is what we do for the local chapters list: every time your chapter presents a concert at your local theatre, club, school or auditorium, what happens to those pesky ASCAP and BMI rights fees that can be so expensive? ATOS pays for them, with a blanket agreement with the rights holders that covers every chapter in the organization.

Now, what else are we working on or thinking about doing that is even more for our chapters? There are several items under discussion, including a series of DVD’s that will focus on, for example,

- a “how-to” in rebuilding basics to help those volunteers who do not have ready access to professionals;
- a youth-oriented DVD that tells our story; and, perhaps more importantly;
- a “sales-pitch” DVD that a local chapter could present to a Rotary/Kiwanis/business group gathering that might help in introducing who we are, might help raise funds, or might help generate the interest in getting an organ

in a new location. ATOS would produce these and make them available to the chapters.

What else? Former President and Board Member John Ledwon has made several strong arguments in two areas. We want to attract younger people? Playing “Five Foot Two” again isn’t going to do it. We need to make a push for more modern music being presented on the organ. Just like our “older” fans of the theatre organ enjoy their favorites, if we want “younger” fans of the theatre organ, we’d better be playing things they are more familiar with, which means music written certainly after 1970, and beyond. And there is plenty of it that works.

Beyond that message, we know that nothing sucks up money like a pipe organ needing repair. We also know that grant money is available for 501c3 organizations. ATOS needs to find a method by which we access more of that grant money. Ideas are being discussed as to which would be the best method to help ATOS and its individual chapters raise more funds. Grant writers are one avenue of approach, and we need to figure out how best to proceed in this area.

These are some of the things ATOS does, and is doing, and wants to do down the road. There are hundreds of great ideas that could help. There are nine Board members, four officers, a handful of staffers and helpers, and most of us have full-time jobs plus families while trying to do the near-full-time work of ATOS. When we get the second-most-irksome question, which begins, “Why don’t you do this (input idea here)?” The basic answer is, that although it might be a wonderful idea, somebody has to implement it.

Former President Nelson Page had the greatest response to that question. He would reply, “That’s a wonderful idea. Why don’t you (the questioner) head up the committee to get that done?” Generally, that would quickly end the conversation.

To help reverse the membership trend – to help the chapters get stronger in membership and get stronger financially – to continue the work of making the organs better and raising the standards of installation, renovation and restoration – and most importantly, the effort to promote the instrument to a wider audience - we need MORE from our Board and staff, we need more volunteers working, and we most definitely need more from our chapter leadership. We need a partnership. Help us help you. We promise to give you our best efforts.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Double". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Ken Double

President