

Jenny Jeffrey

4th Edition of Geneva's organ and silent film festival, "L'orgue fait son cinéma"!



Did you know that Geneva is home to a cinema organ which, though little-known, is worthy of heritage status for its excellent condition and rich tones. Built by Wurlitzer in 1937 for an English cinema in London, it is one of only five surviving organs from this brand in Europe, outside Great Britain (where cinema organs have been preserved to a much greater extent.)

To ensure it will be well-maintained both now and in the future, admirers of the organ have created an association (Friends of the Collège Claparède Cinema Organ Association), presided over by organists, Nicolas Hafner and Vincent Thévenaz. Since 2014 this association has been organizing an annual organ festival, entitled, "L'orgue fait son cinéma", and which is scheduled to take place this year between 31 March and 8 April, 2017.

80th birthday celebration

For organ enthusiasts this year's event is a particularly special occasion as the Wurlitzer cinema organ will celebrate its 80th birthday in 2017! Built in the United States in 1937 for the Granada Theater Clapham Junction in London, the organ currently resides at Geneva's Collège Claparède. Several organists who once played this instrument in London, and who are still alive today, will be special guest performers on two of the most

historic and unforgettable evenings of the festival. With ageless humour they will play popular classic tunes from Britain's recent past. There will also be an opportunity to meet Robert Rowley, who has played a key part in the maintenance of the Wurlitzer organ, and who will both play and host a commentary about the organ during the festival. After opening with organ music that is at once warm, youthful and powerful, the festival will close with a fireworks display on its final evening!



Detailed programme

The 2017 edition of this film festival will feature young musicians from Geneva and France, as well as older ones from the United Kingdom.

On Friday, 31 March, 'If the choir tells you to...' will provide an opportunity for festival goers to hear the choirs of the Collège Claparède and the Collège Emilie-Gourd. Directed by Didier Bonvin, they will perform a repertoire of lively Spanish music featuring songs from different time periods and combining voice, guitars, and dance, with Nicolas Hafner on the organ.

Keeping the spotlight on the youth, the following evening will be given over to Thomas Ospital, who was born in 1990 in the Basque Country (France). An international concert organist and a brilliant improv musician, he has been the Organist at the Church of St. Eustache church in Paris since 2015, and in 2016 was named first organist in residence for Radio France. He will accompany the dramatic Hitchcock film « The Pleasure Garden » (1925), followed by a concert, on Saturday 1 April.

Valentin Villard, future composer for the 2019 Winegrowers' Festival, will delight festival goers by accompanying a short film following his presentation of the inner workings of the organ at 17h30 on 6 April.



To celebrate the Wurlitzer organ's 80th birthday the festival will welcome special guests from England – five organists from London's « Belle Epoque » prior to 1980. John Mann, Keith Beckingham, Bernard Tilley, Len Rawle and David Ivory are sure to provide festival goers with a wonderful listening experience and some delightful oh-so-British moments. For some of them, it will be the first time that they have played this organ in nearly 50 years! Book your tickets to see them on 6 and 8 April.

Sandwiched between these two English-infused evenings will be a screening of "The Phantom Carriage" (1921), which presents the struggles of a family plunged into despair. This great Swedish film by Victor Sjöström, which had an indisputable impact on Ingmar Bergman, is yours for the discovering on Friday 7 April, and will be accompanied by Vincent Thévenaz on the organ.

31 March to 8 April, 2017

L'orgue fait son cinéma! An organ in the limelight!

Collège Claparède Aula (auditorium)

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