

# DETROIT THEATER ORGAN SOCIETY

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DTOS  
Executive Board  
& Directors

## Walt Strony Returns to the Senate

Sunday, September 16  
Doors open at 2:00 p.m. Concert at 3:00 p.m.

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Our concert series resumes after the summer break with the return of the incredible Walt Strony.

One of America's premier concert organists, he made his public debut in 1974 at the age of 18 and has since established himself as one of few organists equally at home playing both theatre and classical organ.

Mr. Strony has performed hundreds of concerts from coast to coast in the United States as well as in Japan, Australia, England, and Canada. In addition, he has performed at many conventions of the American Theatre Organ Society and the American Guild of Organists.

In July 2007 he performed the first solo organ recital to be presented in many years at New York's Radio City Music Hall for the American Theatre Organ Society's 2007 Convention. In June 2016, he was featured for the second time in an evening concert on the famous Wanamaker organ in Philadelphia ~ the world's largest fully functioning pipe organ.

He is the only living organist to have been twice voted "Organist of the Year" by the American Theatre Organ Society - in 1991 and 1993. In 2011, he was inducted into the ATOS "Hall of Fame."



In addition to his fine reputation as a concert organist, Mr. Strony is well known for his many recordings. His first CD "Phoenix" was rated 10/10 by CD Review ~ the highest rating given by this prestigious publication. He has recorded over 31 albums.

As an author, he is well known for his book "The Secrets Of Theatre Organ Registration", which has become the standard reference book on this subject.

In addition to being one of America's most sought after concert organists, he is well known for his work as a pipe and digital organ consultant-finisher. His work in this area has taken him to both theatre and classical instruments across the country and around the world. In 2008, the Allen Organ Company commissioned him to

design a new four-manual instrument - the Walt Strony Signature Series Organ.

Walter Strony was born in Chicago in 1955, and began music lessons at the age of seven. His theatre organ teacher was the famous Chicago organist Al Melgard, who for many years was the Staff Organist at the Chicago Stadium. His classical studies were with Herbert L. White and Karel Paukert

He lives in California's Gold Rush Country, which is located in the Sierra Nevada foothills. In his spare time, he enjoys traveling, fine dining, and collecting contemporary art and Art Deco items.

Don't miss this chance to hear Walt at the Senate Theater. Doors open at 2:00 p.m., with the concert starting at 3:00 p.m. See you at the Senate!

# A natomy of a Restoration: Console Stop Tab Pneumatics

Scott Smith  
DTOS President

Recently, while performing other work in the console, we discovered that pneumatics affecting two Pedal stops at the very end of the lowest partial stoprail had torn leather, and a third had inexplicably popped off. That means those tabs wouldn't move, no matter how many times you press the affected piston buttons. I volunteered to take the torn pneumatics back to my shop and do the deed, since I would be returning to Detroit in a few days anyway.

When re-leathering any organ part whatsoever, the very first three things one needs to do are: document, document, document! The fourth thing is to be suspicious of any work done previously if it is the slightest bit "off" from what you think is right, no matter how much you like or respect the person(s) who did it. Those of us who perform a lot of re-leathering try to keep our notes close at hand so that earlier projects can be referenced easily. Even when we encounter a part that is in absolute original condition, there's always the chance that there was a change in production along the way, or wrong dimensions were used unintentionally (or not) and finally, it is just possible that something may have slipped by the inspector at the factory (remember the Coke bottles in the doors of cars in the 70s!).

So what do we document? Answer: everything. The type of leather used, every conceivable dimension, amount of overlap (to seal the ends), you name it. Not only should dimensions be carefully written down legibly, but whatever the

item in question is should be clearly identified. Otherwise, it's like that telephone number you wrote down with no name next to it. Don't deny it. I know you've done it. We all have. Drives you crazy, doesn't it? It also helps to use those cameras in all of our cell phones to fill in where our memory leaves off.

The next thing to determine is the type of leather. What was used before? Was it appropriate? Did it work adequately? Did it move and return to a relaxed state promptly? In this case, the console pneumatics had all been recovered before. We still have some of this leather around, but it is rotting as quickly as last week's bananas, and so something else will have to do.

In the mid-1990s, a study was conducted to determine why the pre-WWII leather outlasts the stuff tanned since then. The study ultimately determined that, at the beginning of the war, the tanneries intentionally skipped the step of using chromium salts as a preservative in order to speed up the tanning process. This was done so that belts, boots, holsters and everything else made from leather that soldiers would need could be tanned more quickly and efficiently. After the war, tanners seemed to "forget" to use chromium, and so for the next five or so decades, leather was tanned without it. These days, we often see the words "chrome tanned" in our leather catalogs, identified as "CPL" or Certified Pneumatic Leather. Some of the longest lasting pre-WWII leather was deep red in color, and used by the

Robert-Morton and Aeolian organ companies. The attempt to recreate it is now referred to as "Morton" leather, or CML. It's now available in tan, too, for those nostalgic for those colors.

We use a lot of the CML, and this appeared to be a good application. Aside from other good qualities, we are told that the last process the skins go through is to be pinched between plated rollers, so as to reduce or completely eliminate the possibility of leakage through pinholes. As you can see in the photos, we use a wheel-type cutter used for fabric on a self-healing cutting board. We do enough varied work that we have made up several sticks of different widths so as to be able to lay them down on a skin and cut quickly, accurately and eliminate waste.

The console pneumatics were stripped of their leather, and a quick hot water bath removed most of the rest of the leather and the glue. Excepting permanent joints, we only use natural glues for organ work. That means only hot hide glue, cold hide glue or fish glue. The latter two dry more slowly, and do not require any sort of a heat-up time, but for most work, the hot variety works best. Why use those "old fashioned" adhesives? The answer is that they will come off much more easily the next time the item in question gets re-leathered. In this case, the original 1928 fabric hinges were still in great condition, so we left them alone.

We generally work with a jig or fixture of some sort that

offers a predictable, repeatable excursion for the pneumatics to finish. We make them out of a piece of scrap wood and a handful of headless brass escutcheon pins. We carefully mark the surface of the jigs, indicating the type and size of leather used so it won't be a mystery next time. It's not possible to leave the pneumatics in the jig for all sides, but gets us close enough to be able to do the last side(s) freehand. Application of extra pressure or heat or both can help the leather bond more readily with the wood and eliminate any potential leaks.

After drying overnight, we trimmed the leather to a finished dimension and re-attached the overhead arms. If needed, new felt bumpers that contact the stop tab arms are attached. In the photos, they look like someone's artistic interpretation of a Brontosaurus. Finally, new gaskets, cut from a slightly thicker skin of CML are punched with a hollow arch punch with a heavy leather-faced mallet on a rubber pounding board. This will allow pressurized air into the affected pneumatic when movement is required, but will yield to pressure when removed the next time the pneumatic needs recovering.

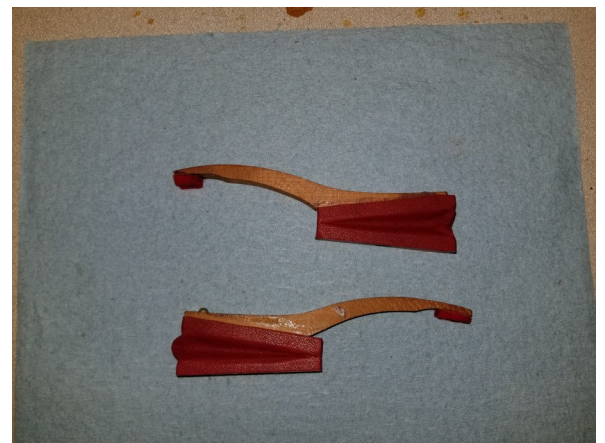
Having removed the front left side panel of the console, the next process was to carefully glue the gasket in place, instead of attaching it directly to the pneumatic. This method offers a fighting chance of getting the air entry holes to line up and allow for maximum air flow to take place. Once the gasket appeared to have dried in position, the

moment of truth arrived, and, with a bit of glue on both surfaces, the pneumatics were applied, one at a time, holding them in place until the bond appeared to be solid. Then, I waited for a while and tested them out before buttoning everything up.

As Wurlitzer console restoration goes, this was child's play. I was lucky that the pneumatics in question were right at the very end of the seemingly endless rows of tab pneumatics. You can see from the photos that the engineering to move the tabs is nothing short of genius. Getting pneumatics from anywhere but the very ends in or out is a pain of gigantic proportions.

We should not take for granted the fact that the Fisher Wurlitzer console is one of the most efficient air consoles anywhere. That means, when you press a piston button, a whole chain of related events must take place in order for tabs to move at our instantaneous whim. Those who have done this sort of work will undoubtedly agree that respecting the original methods and materials usually yields the best results. Other builders of the day utilized different methods for moving tabs, and while they may work adequately, it's hard to best what Wurlitzer did back in the day.

Scott Smith



DETROIT THEATER  
ORGAN SOCIETY

*Over 50 Years of Entertainment!*

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WE'RE ON THE WEB!

[WWW.DTOS.ORG](http://WWW.DTOS.ORG)

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## **2018 Movie Series**

September 8—Faust (silent!)

September 22—The Nutty  
Professor

October 13—The Shining

## **2018 Concert Series**

September 16—Walt Strony

October 14—Christian Elliott

November 18—Hector Olivera

December 2—Stephen & Rose Warner



photo: Lance Luce