

AMERICAN THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY

Doug Powers, Director
3323 Belvoir Blvd
Beachwood, OH 44122
dmp50@ameritech.net
216-401-9671

2009 MID-YEAR REPORT TO THE ATOS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**TO: Mr. Ken Double, CEO, Craig Peterson, Chairman
Mr. Bob Evans, Secretary and
ATOS Board of Directors**

FROM: Doug Powers, Chairman, Strategic Planning Committee

DATE: December 20, 2008

RE: 2008 ATOS Member Survey – Summary and Implications for Change

The 2008 ATOS Member Survey was born out of a need for ATOS leadership to discover and understand the needs and concerns of the grassroots ATOS members. It was also desirable to gather some basic demographic and marketing information as well. This led to the creation of an eight-page survey with twenty-six questions, seeking feedback on several topics, ranging from membership recruitment, how ATOS can help chapters, what priorities are set by chapters, marketing, promotion, fund raising, communication, and others. Most importantly, indicators for direction and action from the national level was seen as a highly desired outcome from this process.

The survey was included in the May, 2008 edition of Theatre Organ, and therefore received by all ATOS Members. Apex Management of Elmhurst, IL was hired to accept the surveys, perform data input, and provide an analysis of all results.

The total amount of reporting from Apex Management is found in a 32-page document that is not included in this seven page report to the Board, but is available per your request.

An extremely concise summary from the volumes of paper, hand written responses, and other feedback follows:

The survey results tell us that the local chapters need and want ATOS to help them continue to make sure the theatre pipe organ survives and indeed thrives in the 21st century. They need tools and guidance for operating their chapters and help promoting what they do already, such as promotion of local concerts. They would also like assistance with specific projects when the opportunity arises and outreach efforts to schools and area talent. ATOS can also serve their members well by providing resources for learning, maintaining and playing the organs. Having a national source for concerts, technicians and other members give respondents the opportunity to connect with others outside their immediate area and chapter.

ATOS AS A PROVIDER OF RESOURCES AND DIRECTION

As one reads through the analysis, the specific responses, and all of the hand-written comments from clearly interested if not concerned members, it appears as though there is a strong need for ATOS to act as a centralized resource center for chapters to manage their operations, keep their existing theatre pipe organs in good repair, and increase the involvement of others so as to maintain their missions. While the journal is seen as a valuable resource, and an incentive to *join* ATOS, it is not as strong an incentive to *remain a member*.

There seems to be an underlying sense of urgency for this centralized kind of support as membership ages and declines in numbers. This is not only true for the national membership roles, but (and more importantly) for the local scene. Let us never forget that if the national ATOS organization were to disappear overnight, most chapters would not find their missions harmed, nor would their enjoyment of the theatre organ be seriously diminished. The Journal would be missed by some, and the absence of conventions would likely be replaced by local or even regional coordinated events without a centralized direction. *This is a strong wake-up call for change in the way we do business. It seems that the onus is on us to determine the most effective restructuring of our organization and execute methods to give chapters an irrefutable reason for belonging to ATOS and working toward realizing the national vision we have created. Other than a promise for change, it is clear that there is currently not enough incentive to bolster high ATOS membership numbers. A paradigm shift that creates perceived and actual benefit is a matter of survival.*

Right now, the traditional annual and regional conventions appear to still provide a source of enjoyment and interest, but an insinuation appears that makes it logical to consider the use of regional workshops and seminars on the technical “how-to’s”. This could easily be topics on pipe organ restoration & maintenance, organ performance, tips on acquisition, fund raising, and development of relationships with local venues where such an instrument could be installed, and used along specific marketing and promotional help.

The above “tools” should not necessarily replace conventions, but might be viewed as three-day workshops where cost is shared between national and local sources. Other perhaps more cost effective means could be to more aggressively step up the two-year old suggestion by this committee to create a series of DVD’s on these and other topics. A sort of programmed learning approach might be worth considering as well. The grassroots feedback seems to support this need, and in addition to the critical need for ATOS to raise funds, providing a means by which chapters can survive is seen as most critical, indeed.

There is also a genuine need for improved communication from national to local, and from chapter to chapter. The idea of using chapter liaisons is most certainly worthwhile, but it is difficult to know how often this is followed up by those responsible, and it is difficult to know how or IF the communications are shared within each chapter. Perhaps increasing the frequency of these emails is indicated, along with a more aggressive profile in the Journal as well as online. It has long been a recommendation by this director that one individual (probably the Public Relations Officer) be in charge of creating monthly or bi-monthly bullet points and/or narration on current ATOS operations, and have fewer directors actually perform the duty of sending

these emails to each chapter, with accountability by way of a cc to the ATOS Chairman. This way, there can be a bit more personalization from each liaison, but the main points remain the same to each chapter, and it is sent more frequently.

Top Areas of Agreement from Members:

Regarding the CEO position, member support was gauged as 3.6 out of 5 (0 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree); yet, this survey was done before this position was created and placing Ken Double in that role. Having a national headquarters was viewed as slightly higher (3.9). In fact, the four highest scores on this scale were:

1. It is imperative that ATOS create a plan to reverse the difficulties in raising money, the dwindling membership, and increase the availability of functioning, publicly available theatre pipe organs. (4.6)
2. It is critical that we increase the number of qualified theatre pipe organ technicians. (4.1)
3. ATOS needs to establish a national headquarters (3.9)
4. I am doubtful ATOS can do anything to help chapters in a meaningful way (2.1).
This indicates that there IS a belief (or hope) that ATOS CAN do something to help!

Top 7 Ways In Which ATOS Can Help Your Chapter (Number of Respondents in Parenthesis):

- Assistance in / improve national and local marketing, publicity and promotion (36)
- Improve communication and visibility between national ATOS and local chapters (i.e. frequent liaison visits, be more responsive and involved, contact members personally) (33)
- Financial assistance (sponsor events, funding, grants) (23)
- Financial guidance (writing grants, professional help, ideas for fundraising, budget examples, becoming legally recognized “non-profit” organization, tax exempt issues, being put in a will) (21)
- Supply chapters with print material / promotional material to hand out at concerts, print in newspapers, submit to local TV and radio stations, etc. (13)
- Increase membership (11)
- Better communication between chapters (Newsletter exchange, reports in the journal of successful ideas and ventures, up to date calendar) (10)

What follows in the next four pages is the summary report completed by Apex Management and this director:

2008 ATOS Member Survey Results Summary

Background

The **American Theatre Organ Society (ATOS)** is dedicated to the preservation of a unique American art form -- the theatre pipe organ and its music. The membership includes musicians, technicians, and enthusiastic listeners -- all devoted to the preservation and continued enjoyment of what we believe to be a national treasure. The goals of ATOS are to preserve, restore, maintain, and promote the theatre pipe organ. Presenting concerts, silent film programs and educational seminars for the general public are but a few of the regularly scheduled chapter activities. Organized in 1955, ATOS has been an international society of more than 5,000 members, with 60 chapters in the United States and foreign countries. Recently, however, membership has been declining. It is assumed the decline is due to few new/younger members joining the organization. The survey was designed to inquire if there is more to it and, if not, what is drawing and keeping members today.

Method

The survey was mailed in the May issue of *Theatre Organ Journal*, a publication mailed to ATOS membership. Approximately 3000 members receive the publication. Included with the survey was an addressed, postage paid envelope to return the survey. It was mailed directly to the Apex Management office in Elmhurst, Illinois, with a deadline date of May 30th. Due to late mailing, however, the deadline was extended. Apex received and tabulated surveys through June 27th, in hopes of capturing the most possible surveys.

Return Rate

Three thousand surveys were mailed to ATOS members in the *Theatre Organ Journal*. Apex received and tabulated 522 surveys. That is a 17.4% rate of return, which is very positive. In reading through the comments and tabulating the results, there are some trends we can see in the ATOS membership.

General Demographic Data

As noted, 522 surveys were tabulated. Respondents were from a large range of chapters, representing all areas of the United States and other countries. Of those, over ninety percent were over the age of 50, with a relatively even split among age groups (22% aged 51-60; 33% aged 61-70; 23% aged 71-80 and 12% aged 81 and above). About the same percentage were male. Approximately seventy percent play the organ, but rate themselves evenly among the levels of technical expertise (i.e., 19% have none and don't want to learn; 19% have none but would like to learn; 19% are novice; 21 % are experienced and 15% are expert).

ATOS Membership

Most respondents (about 70%) have been members for at least 11 years, while about 17% have been a member for five years or less.

Chapter Information

Of the respondents, over 76% belong to a local chapter with the highest number of responses coming from the Garden State Chapter (29), Central Indiana (24), Los Angeles (21), Nor-Cal TOS (20), Valley of the Sun (19) and Puget Sound (18). Similar to ATOS membership rates, nearly 67% of respondents have been members for at least eleven years, with about 19% a member for five years or less. *For those who do not maintain a membership with a local*

chapter, 40% said it was because there is no chapter nearby. About 35% listed a reason other than those provided in the survey. Although no consistent response prevailed, there were several who noted a dislike for the chapter leadership as reason. Other repeated answers included that they are too busy and that they belong to a non-ATOS chapter.

Reasons for Chapter Membership

Respondents marked nearly all reasons provided in the survey at similar rates. Twenty- one percent joined after attending a theatre organ concert; nearly 35% joined because of their passion for the theatre organ; 20% joined to learn more about how the organ works and how to restore them; and nearly 19% wanted to learn more about the organs and playing.

When asked about what they perceive as the greatest value of their chapter membership, nearly half said it was the opportunity to hear and play the organs. Nineteen percent noted their appreciation for chapter efforts to educate the public and fifteen percent noted the social opportunities membership brings.

Reasons for ATOS Membership

For this question, nearly 34% said they joined ATOS to receive *Theatre Organ Journal*, with about 14% noting both the ATOS conferences and the ability to learn about restoration and maintenance. Seventeen percent noted other reasons, such as preservation efforts, and the ability to find out about other concerts and activities taking place throughout the country. In addition, *the fact ATOS membership is required for chapter membership was listed as a reason.*

Members were not asked what they perceived as the greatest value for their ATOS membership, however, *it should be noted that even though the Journal was listed as the greatest reason for joining ATOS, it was clear that for the majority, it is not one of the best reasons for staying a member.*

Reviewing the average score of statements about ATOS membership, most were in the neutral-positive range of 3.2 to 3.8. Exceptions are the comment on the Journal, as noted above, with an average score of 1.6. In addition, “It is critical that we increase the number of qualified theatre pipe organ technicians,” received a positive score of 4.07 and the statement, “I am doubtful ATOS can do anything to help chapters in a meaningful way,” received a negative score of 2.1. *The strongest average of 4.6 was received for the comment, “With dwindling membership, difficulties raising money and increased scarcity of functioning, publicly available theatre pipe organs, it is imperative ATOS create a plan to reverse these trends.”*

“New” Members (Members of a Chapter for Ten Years or Less)

We analyzed those who have been a chapter member for ten years or less and although nearly everything was the same in their response as compared to the overall scores, there were a few differences worth noting. First, this group overall scored less willing to volunteer for the items listed. Second, far fewer consider themselves to be an expert or professional when considering technical expertise. Third, there are more women included in the mix (13% versus the overall average of 11%). Finally, and probably most important, *those who have been members of a chapter for ten years or less agreed at a much greater level that that the journal Theatre Organ is one of the best reasons for being an ATOS member. This says that for younger members (those who have joined more recently) the journal is a valuable resource, but as membership progresses, it becomes less important, instead, other aspects of membership become more valuable.*

Respondent Needs

The final section, titled “Your Needs,” requests comments regarding ways to improve ATOS, chapters and the many issues that pertain to them. Comments tended to fall into four general categories; marketing, parent/component communications, resources and membership. In this context, we considered marketing comments to generally describe efforts to publicize and promote ATOS, its chapters and their activities. We considered items regarding the communications, relationships and politics of the national ATOS and its component chapters to be in the next category. The third, resources, refers to comments requesting resources from the national organization, such as listings, templates, brochures, etc. Finally, the membership is pretty self-explanatory. This area speaks to the need for new members, the type of members, etc. Granted, some comments would fall into more than one category. In those situations, we would mark all categories the comment applied to.

Generally speaking, the comments were consistent with many of the resulting percentages. For example, when respondents were asked to rank the listed goals of their chapter, the leading three (in order) were to *“increase public exposure to the theatre pipe organ,” then to “increase membership,” and third to “improve attendance at our concerts.” In addition, when asked which they would like ATOS to make available to their chapters, the selections that received the highest ranking were “chapter concert promotion and marketing assistance,” then “public relations and marketing tools to take to outside venues and schools,” and then “membership drive help,” respectively.* Overall, members speak of their love of the organ, their enjoyment of hearing it played by a variety of people and the joy in sharing that love of this unique instrument. Judging by the survey, chapter members would like to see the national organization assist them in doing just that.

The greatest number of comments responding to the final five open-ended questions came in the area of **marketing**. For example, suggestions came in the area of establishing public education programs in schools (music history class) and for public access and/or public television. There were several suggestions for additional concerts, namely free, and some also mentioned making the concerts part of old silent movies that would be shown for free. Some suggested posting audio and video files. Others suggest outreach to piano and organ teachers, dealers and players. Still others suggested forming relationships with other organizations. *All of the suggestions focus on the need to increase opportunities of exposing others to the theatre organ.*

The second most common comment focused on the area of **resources**. *Approximately two hundred comments expressed a need for national to be providing the tools chapters need to operate better and for ATOS to serve as a better source overall for information to its members. Chapter leaders are not always experts in the areas they need to be, so examples of good venue agreements, financial procedures and even templates for things like newsletters, membership applications, fundraising help, press releases, etc. would be appreciated. Comments also focused on a need for an organizational brochure (who we are and what we do) that can be used at the chapter level as well.* There were no membership applications at the last concert, noted some! Chapter respondents are also calling for assistance with specific restoration projects. Several restoration projects, installation projects, and even help refurbishing an organ that was hurt in hurricane Katrina, were mentioned.

Respondents would like to see ATOS be a better source for information overall. For example, one common request was finding concerts throughout the country (even beyond chapter activities), as well as sources for area teachers, technicians and even where to purchase organ music or get technical training. Some would like to see a national membership directory.

Elaborating on that, knowing who owns an organ, the type and for how long, as well as possibly listing technical experience of the members would be helpful.

The third most common category dealt with **ATOS/component communications**. The need for ATOS to “be more effective in chapter support” by responding to inquiries, making members feel more welcome. *Some suggested the national board have a better understanding of chapter operations and provide a means for chapter leaders to communicate with each other. There were several comments expressing concern for current leadership and the image of personal agendas and too much “politics.” Some called for new leadership. This may be due to a lack of communication and support for local missions. If chapters don’t see help coming from the national organization, it is assumed national is out of touch and has some other agenda.* On the other hand, their

Perception could be correct. *Members noted wanting to know what the national organization is doing.*

It is also worth noting in the communications area there were several suggestions for partnering with or at least having a relationship with other organizations that may have similar or related interests, such as AGO.

The fourth area came in the area of **membership**, although it should be noted that most of the suggested ways of increasing membership offered by respondents were included in the marketing, resources and communications sections above. *In summary, suggestions for increasing membership, again, were by outreach and publicity and giving chapters the tools to reach out and capture membership – a lack of membership applications means attendees at concerts can’t sign up even if they wanted to that day.* There were suggestions of reaching out to young people, but it should be noted that even those new chapter members were not “young” in the terms of what one would assume. Forty percent of these newer members are between the ages of 61 and 70. Twenty six percent were between the ages of 51 and 60, and only about 11% were under the age of 50.

General Summary Comments

The American Theatre Organ Society is one that focuses on a unique instrument and a unique love. Those who are members speak of their love for the organ and the desire to share that love. The survey results tell us they need ATOS to help them do that. They need tools, guidance for operating their chapters and help promoting what they do already, such as promotion of local concerts. They would also like assistance with specific projects when the opportunity arises and outreach efforts to schools and area talent. ATOS can also serve their members well by providing resources for learning, maintaining and playing the organs. Having a national source for concerts, technicians and other members give respondents the opportunity to connect with others outside their immediate area and chapter.