

The Organ Log

LOS ANGELES

THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY

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In This Issue:

Cover Page:

Final Note: Bill Field, by
Danny Tokusato

Page 2:

Final Note continued,

Page 3:

Final Note continued

Page 4:

Facebook tributes to Bill Field

Page 5:

Links to Bill Field:

*Hot Pipes Tribute

*Los Angeles Times

*CBS Sunday Morning Show

*Old Town Music Hall

Page 6:

Phil Maloof Passed Away
San Gabriel Mission Fire

Page 7:

Membership Form

Page 8:

LATOS Directors & Board



Final Note: William C. Field

10/4/1939 – 6/28/2020

by Danny Tokusato

William (Bill) C. Field was born on October 4, 1939 in Los Angeles to William Thomas Field and Gertrude Sara Hopkins, both employees of the Los Angeles Unified School District.

As an infant, Bill's love of music was apparent as he would often cry until his mother played music on the radio. Bill found his love and future avocation when he wandered through the Barker Bros. department store in downtown L.A. with his grandmother and was captivated by the sound of a pipe organ that serenaded browsing shoppers. Bill begged his par-

ents to learn the pipe organ, which he began studying at the tender age of 8. Seeing his talent, potential and passion for the organ, Bill's mother bought him a Hammond Organ and encouraged his growth as an artist.

By the time he was 12, Bill was hired as the organist at the Los Angeles Theatre on South Broadway playing organ preludes and has never wandered far from the instrument.

Throughout his career, Bill played at many churches and venues throughout Southern California, including the Iceland ice skating rink, in Paramount. He also played the organ for J.B. Nethercutt, founder and owner of Merle Norman Cosmetics. In addition, Bill owned and operated a restaurant in

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

El Segundo, Ca.

Bill and his business partner and friend Bill Coffman (the “two Bills”) found their prized possession – a 1925 Mighty Wurlitzer Theater Pipe Organ – for sale at the long closed and derelict Fox West Coast Theater in Long Beach.

In 1958, the two Bills borrowed \$2,000 from a credit union to buy the instrument and installed it themselves within 2 years at Bill’s home in South Los Angeles. Here, the men performed live concerts to adoring audiences on a weekly basis.

Needing a larger venue to house the organ and accommodate the growing crowds, the two Bills searched all over Los Angeles for a permanent home for their Wurlitzer. Finally, they located a worthy location in El Segundo in a boxy neighborhood building formerly known as the “State Theater” which originally opened in 1921 as a silent picture movie house. After its heyday, the building also served as a Baptist Church among other ventures.

The empty shell of the State Theater served as their blank canvas to create a place where audiences could experience the full spectacle of watching a movie during Hollywood’s heyday in a grand movie palace that also featured live music. Here, the two Bills opened Old Town Music Hall in 1968, a one of a kind venue in sleepy El Segundo, a time warp and hidden gem waiting to be discovered by all who appreciate classic movies, music, and the powerful yet ephemeral sound of the theater pipe organ.

In addition to the installation of their prized Wurlitzer which now has over 2,000 pipes and 244 keys on 4 keyboards and various sounds, the two Bills installed plush theater seats, ruby red carpets, majestic curtains, huge chandeliers, and framed the stage and movie screen in grand proscenium. Thousands of concerts and movies have entertained audiences ever since.

After Coffman’s death in 2001, Bill continued to improve the ambiance of the Old Town Music Hall with projects large and small; including painting and adorning the proscenium with golden floral ornaments, adding contrasting theatrical curtains that shimmered in the spotlight, hanging 4 huge evocative oil paintings

along the theater walls, and fully covering the ceiling in antique tin tiles. The magic that is felt when first entering Old Town Music – often heard through ‘wows’ or audible gasps – is a testament to Bill’s creative genius, bold vision, tenacity and moxie to ‘make it happen’ despite many challenges.

With Coffman gone, Bill carried on alone, presiding as host as well as house organist.

At the beginning of each show, Bill would make his way up to the organ and introduces the upcoming program. Then, turning his attention to the console of the Mighty Wurlitzer, the theater is darkened as the spotlight intensifies its focus on Bill. The curtains slowly open, almost teasingly, to reveal a glowing and eerily beautiful organ that springs to life under the orchestration of Bill, the Wizard of the Wurlitzer! The audience is treated to a musical explosion and sing-along before intermission and the feature movie.

Bill played for every crowd as though it was his last performance, whether 2 or 200 were in the audience.

Bill had the rare ability to manifest his beautiful soul in his music. It was as though his music spoke to you personally and offered a soothing massage and escape from your worries, all you had to do was sit back and allow the music take you. Many described listening to Bill perform as a “religious experience” or as being hypnotized by the sound of the organ that engulfed them, touched their soul, and transported them to a different time and place; only roused to reality upon the end of the last note. It was not uncommon for some in the audience to be moved to tears by the purity and emotive power of Bill’s music or by long forgotten memories Bill’s music often aroused.

Bill was, and is, a legendary figure here in Southern California and a Master Showman, indeed!

Bill was the living embodiment of the starving artist, sometimes sacrificing his modest stipend in order to pay the theater bills and keep it going. However, if love given and love received was a currency, Bill would be a millionaire many times over! He generously gave gifts, bought meals, and threw parties for his many friends as though money was no object. De-

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spite periodic financial challenges, Bill was always happy because he lived his passion for music, resulting in a meaningful and fulfilling life that anyone would envy, while simultaneously touching the hearts of so many. He loved people and people loved him more!

As his health declined, Bill navigated his way to the organ on a scooter but never failed to pull the audience under the spell of the Wurlitzer. In fact, Bill's love affair with old movie theaters, silent film and the soaring power of the Mighty Wurlitzer was so infectious that he always had a group of die-hard fans and a stable of followers willing to do anything for him and the theater.

Bill ensured the survival of the Old Town Music Hall by taking under his wing and mentoring one of these followers, Edward Torres, who was a young 14-year-old aspiring theater organist when he first came to the theater.

Over the last two years, as Bill's skills deteriorated, he increasingly relied on Edward (now 24) to play the shows at the Old Town Music Hall; effectively handing over the reins to Edward, a trusted and dedicated disciple of Bill's passion and vision. With hard work and dedication, Edward has become a great talent in his own right and has committed to continuing Bill's tradition by literally taking Bill's seat at the Mighty Wurlitzer and now serves as CEO of Old Town Music Hall.

In 2018, the Old Town Music Hall celebrated its 50th anniversary. With any luck, Edward will be playing for the theater's 100th anniversary, carrying on Bill's legacy for decades.

Because of Bill's passion, vision, dedication, sacrifice, and leadership, the Old Town Music Hall has become a cultural landmark and beloved Los Angeles institution. The two Bills created an experience that is truly unique that evokes a rare sense of childhood awe and amazement for the young and old, enjoyed and to be enjoyed by past, current, and future generations.

In addition to being the talented visionary proprietor of Old Town Music Hall, Bill will forever be known and remembered as the loving and generous 'grandpa' that many never had and adopted as their own, as the

'counselor' and confidant who helped so many through the most difficult times of their lives, the 'proud papa' and savior to many shelter cats of various colors and temperaments, the 'loyal friend' who was always up for a late night chat or an urban adventure on the Metro Rail, the 'L.A. historian' who shared his love for the city with his many friends, the 'comedian' with a joke (or song) for all occasions, and as the 'loving partner' who never forgot a special occasion always bearing gifts of chocolates and roses presented to his appreciative partner with tears of joy and love in his eyes.

On June 28, 2020; at the age of 80, Bill succumbed to prostate cancer and passed away peacefully at his home in South Los Angeles surrounded by loved ones. His last words were "I love you, I love you" whispered to his heartbroken partner. Though Bill is now undoubtedly among the angels in heaven and serenading them with beautiful music, he is greatly missed by all he left behind.

Thank you, Bill, for dedicating your life to preserving, showcasing and advocating appreciation for early 20th century American music, film, and the theater pipe organ. We promise you that in addition to the many young people you mentored in music and life throughout the years, the Old Town Music Hall will continue to thrive as your legacy and gift to the world.

You lived an impactful life that mattered!

Thank you for your love, thank you for the movies and beautiful music, thank you for the many meals, thank you for your guidance and mentorship, thank you for the adventures, thank you for the memories! I love you too, Bill, I love you too.

Bill is survived by his longtime partner, Danny Tokusato, and sisters Diane Calavita and Joan Hoff. A funeral and service were held at Green Hills Memorial Park in Rancho Palos Verdes, CA. Donations to the non-profit venue in Bill's memory may be made through the website: www.OldTownMusicHall.org.



(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

FROM FACEBOOK:

FB June 28. It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of William C. Field, founder of Old Town Music Hall.

When the theater re-opens after the current closure for Covid-19, we hope you will visit in person to experience and celebrate the legacy of this unique, creative and wonderful man.

The world will miss him.

[Angie Hougen](#), FB June 29, Bill laughed harder than anyone, and brought magic to my life. His musical soul ran deep, and he could express musical poignancy in silent film like no one else. I loved every moment of our time together, and I will miss him dearly.

[Donna Wilson](#) Bill will be dearly missed. Thank you for a wonderful, good clean venue that families could enjoy together. I will always cherish the times that my dad and I shared there. My condolences to the family.

[Mark Somers](#) What a great run Bill Fields, and Bill Coffman had with that theater. I hope the tradition continues with the newer staff. Rest in peace Bill Field.

[Marsha Pumel Hansen](#) I'm so sorry...Bill was such an important part of our community and wonderful man. He left an amazing legacy.

[Rusty Frank](#) I miss him so much already. But knowing his legacy will live on is a great solace.

[Christina Straussburg](#) Condolences to his family including his theatre family. I am grateful for his love of The Old Town Music Hall and films shown there. The love is felt the minute you walk through the doors to first note played on the organ. He will be missed.

[Steve Allen](#) I was honored to discover the theater 5 years ago and talk with Bill every time. He was always sitting in the lobby, greeting patrons and happy to talk with anyone. What a treasure to lose! God-speed, Bill! You will be missed and never replaced. Just succeeded.

[Mike Vowles](#) His love of cinema was infectious.

[Peggy Barthel](#) This makes me so very sad. Tony took me to OTMH for our second date and I fell in love that night! Bill was so kind to allow us to be married in the theater. I adore him and OTMH.

[R Allison McKernan](#) So sad to be reading this. I was fortunate enough to see him perform during a showing of Phantom Of The Opera. I will never forget him and how festive the theatre was during Halloween season.

[Art Hazeldine](#) I had the privilege of hearing Bill play once for Wings. It was a memorable experience.

[Larry Stouch](#) First met Bill in 1968 when the theater first opened. I was just a kid but attended the screenings every year since. A friend has been lost.

[Karen Coulter](#) I was thinking of Bill yesterday. I was in El Segundo in the early afternoon. Can't travel through this town without him popping into my mind!! In that moment, I was wishing that I could see one of his Sunday matinees. A wonderful man and an amazing legacy.

[Cary Ginell](#) Bill took a chance on my group, the Seda-lia Ragtime Orchestra, and we were fortunate to have played at the OTMH a number of times over the last decade. He always managed to fill the house and provide for our needs. Nice man.

[Spencer Hunt](#) A huge thanks to Bill for his incredible vision and gift to us all.

[Candace Blankenship](#) Oh I'm heartbroken. He was a very kind man and always had a smile on his face. I was so hoping to see him again when the theatre re-opened.

[Heidi Brennan-Darby](#) When things open up, please have a fun event in his honor— this was obviously his passion as viewed from the audience! He will be missed.

[William L. Coale](#) I was heartbroken when I heard about Bill's condition, but he's at peace now. I will always mourn his loss, but will remember the twinkle in his eye whenever he would tell me the mandatory "colorful" story. The theatre organ world has lost a

(Continued on page 5)

giant. RIP, dear friend. Say "hi" to GW for me. The switchboard is now closed.

[Frank Thornton](#) His venue was the main reason for me traveling all the way to Pasadena for the ATOS 2018 Convention, and I wasn't disappointed. I found him a lovely, friendly down-to-earth sort of chap - just normal - I am glad I got the chance to meet him, and I send my sincere condolences to All his family and friends - R.I.P. Mr. Field.

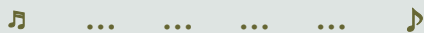
[Thomas Ball](#) me, my family, and friends have been going there since the mid eighties!!! We will always support this magical place and honor the founders who are now together in the musical screening room in heaven!!!

[Mark Tracy](#) Very sad. When elder statesmen of entertainment pass; another link from the past is lost.

[Barbara Effros](#) Such sad news. Clearly Bill was cherished by so many fine people. 225 shares of the news of his passing (in 7 hours). Let's all support The Old Towne Music Hall and send comfort to Bill's family and friends.

[Paul Castiglia](#) I'm deeply saddened to learn of Bill's passing. The impact of Bill Field's and Bill Kaufman's vision is immeasurable - countless lives have been touched, entertained and edified by what they created and facilitated for so many years. We've been beyond blessed by the Bills, and will continue to be as their legacy is carried on. My heart goes out to the volunteers who worked so closely with Bill Field over the years. Rest in peace, Bill.

[David Lindsay](#) I've been going there since 1972. My favorite place of all. I became a silent movie fan, organ fan, and fan of all the different groups playing there. What an incredible place. Bill's command of the organ, and his tireless accompaniments of full length films are something I will always remember. Really nice man too. He will be missed. Please support this theatre; it is a treasure.



SOME LINKS TO BILL FIELD

Stephen Ashley, from his show "Hot Pipes" did an absolutely marvelous tribute to Bill Field. *Editors Note; I truly enjoyed it and will listen to it again!* Click here for the link to "Hot Pipes" <https://www.hotpipes.eu/half-hour-broadcast-285/>

Click here to read [LOS ANGELES TIMES](#) story on Bill from July 10, 2020.



Here's a video about Bill and his theater on CBS Sunday Morning: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=235&v=tVpnL4Wrips&feature=emb_logo

**Now, more than ever,
your generous support is
needed to keep Old Town
Music Hall alive.**

www.OldTownMusicHall.org.



Passing of Phil Maloof, aka "Uncle Phil"

George Maloof, Phil Maloof's nephew, confirmed his uncle's passing Saturday, April 4, in Las Vegas at age 93, with coronavirus the cause.

Phil Maloof's official bio notes he is a man whose "eccentric life enlivens the ordinary and brings forth collections of treasures from the past to now become keepsakes for future generations to come.

Phil was an avid collector, who proudly displayed his treasures on his website, from theater organs to art. He owned over 200 classic cars, and thousands of paintings. He also owned the original Roxy Theater pipe organ from New York, which was featured at the Fiesta in North Las Vegas."

His website described Phil as "a man of sentiment and of simple pleasures."

Sources; <https://www.reviewjournal.com/entertainment/entertainment-columns/kats/coronavirus-claims-las-vegas-icon-uncle-phil-maloof-1999717/>

From [Terry Kleven](#) on FB, 4/4/20

It saddens me greatly to let you know that **Phil Maloof** passed away April 4, 2020.

"Uncle Phil" was a great guy who loved the Theatre Organ so much that he had two of them installed in his Las Vegas home. The first one was 6 manuals with over 800 stops and the other was 5 manuals with around 350 stops. Phil loved his theatre organs just as he loved his antique car collection. Phil Maloof was in his early 90's so, rest in peace Uncle Phil...

John Lauter wrote; *Rest In Peace, uncle Phil. You were the eccentric uncle we all wish we had.*

Laura Day wrote: *Oh what a character he was! It was always so much fun when he came to town. Rest In Peace Uncle Phil.*

Lew Williams wrote: *I recall the first time I met him. He had his little Electric Marquee name badge all lit up. Shook my hand and roared "HI!!! I'M PHIL MALOOF!! I'VE GOT 47 CLASSIC CARS!!"*

Gary Owen wrote: *He will be greatly missed. Such a kind unselfish man. Always a great supporter of the organ. RIP dear friend. ♪*

San Gabriel Mission Fire

Fire Official Say Fire Apparently Started In Choir Loft. Arson Is A Possible Cause

Story by **Terry Miller**, July 13, 2020
<https://www.pasadenaindependent.com/news/san-gabriel-mission-firejuly-112010/>

The blaze that eviscerated the historic San Gabriel Mission early Saturday morning appears to have started in the church's choir loft before shooting rapidly to the roof of the nearly 250-year-old historic mission.

The choir loft, a 250-square-foot area that also housed the pipe organ, is now the focal point for investigators who are considering arson as a possible cause, said Captain Antonio Negrete of the San Gabriel Fire Department, according to numerous reports.

The massive four-alarm fire destroyed a great deal of the San Gabriel Mission. When firefighters made a forced entry into the church in an attempt to put out the blaze, portions of the roof and ceiling began to fall, according to a fire department spokesperson.

About 80 firefighters from 12 area fire agencies fought the blaze for nearly three hours.

"During the initial stages of the fire attack, firefighters were able to remove historical artifacts and some artwork from the path of the blaze," Fire Chief Steven Wallace told national news outlets. "Once the heavy fire in the roof was knocked down, firefighters re-entered the old church and made a valiant stand to cut off the horizontal spread of the fire near the altar area, sparing items that date back to the late 1700s."

The community of San Gabriel appeared stunned Sunday morning. The fire provoked deep emotions and parishioners were seen holding rosary beads as tears rolled down the cheeks of some. □



The Los Angeles Theatre Organ Society was founded in 1961, and owns pipe organs at the Wilshire Ebell, South Pasadena High School, and Pasadena City College. LATOS members can play these organs several times a year. LATOS also has access to many other instruments for its events in the southern California area. In addition to its Mission Statement, its key focus today is membership growth, expansion of member activities, promoting the theatre pipe organ to local youth, and encouraging active involvement in the organization. For more information about LATOS, please visit www.LATOS.org

This is your invitation to enjoy wonderful entertainment and memorable experiences! Join LATOS as a voting member, or as a “Friend” and enjoy our events while supporting the preservation of an increasingly rare and unique instrument and art form, the theatre pipe organ!

The easiest and fastest way to join or renew is online at www.LATOS.org or you can simply complete the form below and include your check in the amount of \$20 (or more), then mail to:

LATOS NEW MAILING ADDRESS:
PO Box 4545, West Hills, CA 91308.
(DO NOT MAIL CASH)

Your Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

E-Mail: _____

Phone: _____

NOTE: If you would like to receive occasional email messages about important LATOS related news and events, please take a brief moment to register your email address on our website at www.LATOS.org (using the “Sign Up” form on the bottom-left of the main page). Be assured that we will not share your email address with anyone, and that we will not barrage you with unnecessary information. We will only send important email reminders about key upcoming LATOS events. Thank you.

QUESTIONS? Contact our Membership Director; Vicki Yearian, at fodofixer@msn.com or 951-943-1747



LATOS NEW MAILING ADDRESS:

PO Box 4545,
West Hills, CA 91308.

**Los Angeles
Theatre Organ
Society**

Please, Join / Renew ONLINE

Go to www.latos.org, click on the MEMBERSHIP link and then select "JOIN / RENEW NOW"

"The doors are always open for donations."

From Treasurer, Angie Hougen: As a non-profit organization, LATOS depends on its membership fees and donations to pay the operational expenses of the chapter. If you would like to donate to our chapter, checks can be mailed to our PO Box 4545, West Hills, CA 91308. OR EVEN EASIER, donate online! Click here [LINK TO DONATE to LATOS](#)

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