

Some of the world's greatest performers will be coming to Blackwood in the next few months, making this 2017 season one of the most exciting in BTOS history.

GLEDHILL RETURNS FOR MAKE-A-WISH

SIMON GLEDHILL was at Blackwood in 2004; but because of the huge demand for his talent in the U.S., it has taken over a decade to schedule his return concerts on July 9. Like other British performers who have captured America with their genius, Gledhill is known throughout the world for his excellent techniques and beautiful interpretations of popular and light music on the theater organ.

Since winning his first competition at 17, Simon has been a favorite BBC recording and broadcast artist. He has toured Germany, Holland, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, and has performed at all major theater organ venues in Great Britain and the United States, where he has been featured at numerous American Theatre Organ Society conventions and in 1997 was honored as ATOS Organist of the Year.

Gledhill's music has won high praise from his peers. Lyn Larson said, "He is that rare combination of flawless technique, impeccable phrasing and an unerring sense of musical good taste." Nigel Ogdon added, "Here is someone who was born to be a theater organist. His ability has earned him the genuine admiration of both audiences and colleagues alike."

In addition to his concert and recording activities, and working with Britain's Cinema Organ Society, Simon has a full-time career in corporate banking, based in London.

The July 9 concert will benefit children from the north Butler area who have been referred to the Make-A-Wish Foundation. There will be two performances, one at 2:00 p.m. and the other at 4:30 p.m., with refreshments between.



TRADITIONAL JAZZ CAPTIVATES AUDIENCE

On August 13, when **RON BICKEL** brings the **Merrymakers Jazz Trio** to Blackwood, the music room will be filled with a cross-section of lively traditional jazz—Dixieland, Big Band, and more contemporary styles—and the audience will be captivated by Benny Goodman hits, Sinatra's "My Way," and Glenn Miller's "In the Mood."



Ron Bickel, leader of the Trio, holds a B.S. and M.M. degree in Piano/Jazz from Duquesne University, and is a professor of Jazz Piano at Duquesne's School of Music. He has performed with many notable jazz artists, including Mel Torme, The Skyliners, Billy Eckstine, Glenn Miller and Jimmy Dorsey bands, Little Anthony and the Imperials, The Modernaires, and Bobby Vinton. He has performed at all of the big venues in Pittsburgh as well as on the radio, television, and movies, and with his own group at notable Jazz Festivals in Pennsylvania. Ron is a composer and arranger, and author of *The Complete Jazz Pianist* and *Developing Relative Pitch*, which are used at Duquesne and throughout the world.

Filling out the Trio will be saxophone/clarinet player **TONY GALLO**, who has performed with the Pittsburgh Symphony and the Civic Light Opera Orchestras, and drummer **GARY NOAH**, former Band Director at Chartiers-Houston High School.

The Merrymakers Jazz Trio was awarded "Best of 2016" by Gig Masters. Their Blackwood concert will be five stars, for the performers are first class. They have been together for more than 19 years, they know jazz thoroughly, and they instinctively play the music as it was meant to be communicated. Reviewers say, "While people who love jazz love this group; even better, people who don't love jazz are also very enthusiastic—their music is infectious."

WICKERHAM BRINGS LIFE TO “THE GENERAL”

If you chased the New York streets with Babe Ruth and **Dave Wickerham** in “*Speedy*,” you can imagine what Wickerham will do with **Buster Keaton’s** silent film “*The General*.” In the intimate setting of the Blackwood music room, Wickerham will take the famous locomotive chase to infinity. He is THAT GOOD! “*The General*” has been ranked by the American Film Institute as **one of the greatest American films ever made**, and voted one of the **10 greatest films of all time** in a *Sight & Sound* poll. But the rank won’t matter because for you, the performance at Blackwood will be unforgettable.

The film, a historical parody set during the Civil War, is based on William Pittenger’s book “*The Great Locomotive Chase*.” Pittenger was the engineer involved in the actual chase. His history is from the North’s vantage point, whereas Keaton’s is from the South’s, involving a Confederate locomotive (called *The General*) hijacked by Union spies. Reviewer Gary Giddins recently described the locomotive pursuit as “relentless as any Bourne blowout.” He also said, “Keaton’s comedic understatement makes ‘*The General*’ a surprisingly modern experience. The storytelling and the gags are free of sentimentality and knockabout clichés and the four-minute battle scene is simply one of the most gripping, and occasionally hilarious, ever filmed.”



“*The General*” was one of the most expensive films of its time--\$750,000 [\$10,146,147 today], according to Joseph Schenck, co-producer. To generate an accurate historical re-creation of the Civil War episode, Keaton had 3,000 people on its payroll, and faced hundreds of extras in the building of real bridges and dams, and an actual locomotive falling from a burning bridge into a gorge far below. (Fans still take pilgrimages to the site where this scene was filmed to view objects that remain.)

When released in early 1927, “*The General*” was poorly received, and its failure to return a significant profit cost Keaton his independence as a filmmaker. Regardless, in 1963 Keaton said, “I was more proud of that picture than any I ever made, because I took an actual happening out of the history books, and I told the story in detail.” Audiences and critics later agreed with its worth, for it is now considered a major classic. In 1989 (the first year the Library of Congress, U.S. National Film Registry was enacted), “*The General*” was selected for preservation as being culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant--along with such films as “*Gone with the Wind*,” “*Star Wars Episode IV*,” and “*The Wizard of Oz*.”

The film was released on Blu-Ray in February 2017. In the coinciding issue of *Filmmaker Magazine*, Sidney Lumet wrote, “For all the imitations and all the advances in technology, ‘*The General*’ is as thrilling as it ever was—maybe more so, since Keaton’s life-risking stunts and spectacular pyrotechnics provide a visceral ecstasy no digital effects can possibly replicate.” It must be remembered that Keaton never used a double, even for very dangerous scenes. Keaton grew up in a vaudeville family. As part of the act, he was thrown around the stage, learning his physical skills in a painful childhood apprenticeship.

On September 10, Wickerham will have YOU identifying with Keaton’s character in every locomotive chase and every tender moment with the beautiful Annabelle Lee. Make your reservation **now**, for the past two Wickerham concerts “SOLD OUT” early.



NORDWALL CONNECTS WITH ALL

JONAS NORDWALL, the “grandee of the organ arts,” one of the most respected organists in the world, will be back for the scholarship dinner-concert on October 8. His theme will be “The Theater Organ in the 21st Century.”

Nordwall is a brilliant organist, skilled in all types of music. He grew up in the days when Elvis Presley was “king”; but Jonas was drawn to the pipe organ, instead of the electric guitar, because of its powerful bass. He loves the theater pipe organ! It has consumed both his professional and personal life, and his enthusiasm connects with all who are privileged to hear him play. During a concert, he will bring out the best the instrument can give, from the timbres of an inspiring hymn or patriotic cry, to the tender tones of a love song, or the spirited beat of “Stayin’ Alive.” All he wants is for people to enjoy his music. Jonas has over 30 highly-acclaimed recordings which are heard on the syndicated radio show “Pipedreams.”



At 16, Jonas performed before Sweden’s King Gustav Adolf. Since then, he has captured audiences in China, Japan, Switzerland, the U.K., New Zealand, and Australia. He had long runs at the lavish Organ Grinder restaurants in Portland and Denver, has solo appearances with Symphony Orchestras in Oregon, Washington, Vancouver, and the Silicon Valley, and is a regular for American Guild of Organist and American Theatre Organ Society conventions. He is the principal coordinator for the ATOS Youth and Adult Educational Theater Organ Summer Camp Program.

In addition to his performing career, Nordwall has been a major influence in the design and manufacture of both pipe and electronic organs, working over 30 years with the Rodgers Organ Company and, presently, with the Allen Organ Company. A few years ago, Jonas was honored for his long tenure as organist with the First United Methodist Church in Portland and for his redesign and oversight of the \$500,000 rebuilding project for its 7,400-pipe organ.

On every occasion that Jonas has performed at Blackwood, the audience has appealed for more! This concert is included in the Contributing Membership. Sign up today, for space is very limited.



THIS YEAR’S RECITAL ON JUNE 4 will be a great opening for the 2017 concert season. It will feature the 2017 BTOS scholarship winners—James Cunningham IV (viola), Grace Halloran (violin), Runa Shuda (flute), Madison Sinan (trumpet)—and a special performance by Katerina Istomin. As usual, the recital is free, open to the public, so bring a friend and enjoy springtime at Blackwood.



WE HAVE AN EXCITING ANNOUNCEMENT: Katerina Istomin, one of our 2004 BTOS scholarship winners, has



volunteered to Chair the Scholarship Committee! Katerina, an international viola/violin performer and educator, is very passionate about education and music. She was principal viola of the Julliard Orchestra and the New World Symphony and has toured throughout North and South America, Europe, and Asia. Recognized for her powerful effect on young musicians, she has worked as a fellow with the Music Advancement and Gluck Committee Service programs with the Julliard School, and as a teaching artist in Colombia and the New World Symphony. She earned her Bachelor of Music in Viola Performance from Julliard, and her Master of Music from the Universite de Montreal and the Hochschule fur Musik und Darstellende Kunst in Vienna, Austria. Two years ago, she received a Master of Science in Professional Counseling from Carlow University.

KUDOS, CONDOLENCES and THANK YOU!

Several years ago, we quoted a message from one of Susan Kemenyffy's sketchbooks that read: *"Without consent or consultation, each of us slips into the mainstream of history's timeline, travels through full-some and Spartan hours, then—without appointment—departs. But in those too brief, magical moments in between, we work & dream, we build & forge identities, we explore new worlds to explain & extend our own."*

We are aware of a few of those "magical moments" when identities were established by long-time BTOS members. These ever-modest friends do not boast of their successes, but we thought you might be interested.

Carol Semple Thompson, one of the most decorated female amateurs in golf history, and a 2008 inductee into the World Golf Hall of Fame, is one of 14 distinguished women golfers invited to become a member of the Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, Scotland, ending its 260 years of male-only exclusivity.

In its Jan/Feb 2017 issue, *Artist's Magazine* announced that from 1,371 entries, 73 finalists, **Bill Vrscak** was the First Place winner of the landscape category in the Magazine's 33rd Annual Art Competition. His watercolor, titled "The Alley," is from his paintings of inner-city neighborhoods that have a special meaning to him.



ON A SOMBER NOTE, **Agnes Conway**, a BTOS longtime friend, is among the departed. Agnes joined in all of the festivities, volunteering her time, refreshments, her big smile, and sometimes just her love and support when needed. We will miss her presence among us but are most grateful for those "too brief, magical moments" that we shared.

"THANK YOU!" Seventeen years ago, **Jane and Tom Tibbott, Will and Nancy Willems, and Marna Bodnar**, were among a few BTOS members who met to discuss the establishment of a Scholarship program, initiated with a gift from the Estate of Robert Mitchell, one of the first friends and volunteers at Blackwood. With Richard Page of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra acting as Chair, the group worked diligently over the years attempting to reach and discover some of the most outstanding talent among the high school seniors intending to pursue a career in music performance. Through 2017, the program has granted \$284,000 to 81 recipients, some who have become the best in their fields. These early committee members have served their term many times over. With the establishment of a new, rotating BTOS Board of Directors, it is only fitting that they should have a period of rest. We owe them so much for their dedication and guidance in this venture. They follow the stories of the students they helped along the way, and their eyes twinkle and they smile as they remember some of their favorites. **THANK YOU JANE, TOM, WILL, NANCY, AND MARNA.** We look forward to being with you at upcoming Blackwood events.



A note to our supporters and volunteers: More than a quarter century has passed since Blackwood's first concert benefitting children in the Make-A-Wish program. Your financial support of all our endeavors since then has been overwhelming—and the unending dedication of our great team of volunteers is beyond compare. Blackwood has no paid staff. Everything needed to make a Blackwood experience so special is handled by volunteers, who give of themselves and their resources over and over! Our hearts are genuinely grateful for all that has been given—and we hope that your hearts can feel that appreciation. You may forget our sincere "Thank You" but may you never forget that your kindness has made it all worthwhile! **THANK YOU, ONCE AGAIN!!**

2017 MEMBERSHIP, PROGRAM, AND RESERVATIONS

Blackwood is a place where the public can enjoy the natural environment, listen to music, and pursue other forms of art. In 1999, the Blackwood Theater Organ Society was recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization and all contributions to it are tax deductible, as allowed by law. BTOS has annual concerts benefitting children in the northern Butler Make-A-Wish group, and a funded program that awards scholarships to high school seniors continuing their education towards a career in instrumental music performance. It is a volunteer organization, with no paid staff. If you are interested in membership, volunteering, or attending any of the events, please return the reservation form at the bottom of this page.

There are two levels of membership for 2017:

- (1) BASIC MEMBERSHIP OF \$20 PER HOUSEHOLD, WHICH IS FULLY TAX-DEDUCTIBLE.
- (2) CONTRIBUTING MEMBERSHIP OF \$125 PER PERSON, WHICH INCLUDES A RESERVATION TO THE DINNER CONCERT AND A DONATION TO THE SCHOLARSHIP FUND. IT IS 50% TAX DEDUCTIBLE.
[ANY DONATIONS ABOVE THESE AMOUNTS ARE WELCOME—ANY TIME]

PROGRAM FOR 2017: All concerts are on a SUNDAY, begin at 2:00 p.m. (unless noted), and include refreshments.

JUNE 4 – RECITAL BY SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS. Free concert, open to the public.

JULY 9 – MAKE-A-WISH CONCERT FEATURING SIMON GLEDHILL, ORGANIST. Contributions, payable to “Make-A-Wish” will be received at each performance. Please note this is a benefit concert and all reservations should be guaranteed. Minimum donation, \$25 per person.

AUGUST 13 –RON BICKEL and the MERRYMAKERS JAZZ TRIO -- \$25 per person.

SEPTEMBER 10 – DAVE WICKERHAM/CLASSIC FILM “THE GENERAL” STARRING BUSTER KEATON --\$30 per person.

OCTOBER 8 – DINNER CONCERT with JONAS NORWALL, ORGANIST - \$125 per person (Included in Contributing Membership.)

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- () BASIC MEMBERSHIP \$20 PER HOUSEHOLD \$ _____
- () CONTRIBUTING MEMBERSHIP \$125 PER PERSON \$ _____
(Including dinner and JONAS NORDWALL concert) Number attending _____
- () MERRYMAKERS JAZZ TRIO \$25 PER PERSON \$ _____
- () WICKERHAM/KEATON FILM “THE GENERAL” \$30 PER PERSON \$ _____

TOTAL PAYABLE TO BLACKWOOD THEATER ORGAN SOCIETY OR “BTOS” ----\$_____

() RECITAL BY SCHOLARS (FREE).....Number Attending _____

() MAKE A WISH CONCERT.....Time _____ Number Attending _____
Checks, payable to “Make A Wish” will be received at the concert.

() VOLUNTEER: FOOD _____ OTHER/INFORMATION _____

NAME _____ E-MAIL _____

ADDRESS _____ PHONE _____

Note: Reservations will be confirmed; no tickets will be issued

**MAIL TO BTOS c/o BETTY DIGBY, 2428 HUNTINGTON DRIVE, PITTSBURGH, PA 15241
412-835-8056**

2017 CALENDAR

JUNE 4 – 2:00 p.m.

Recital by

2017 Scholarship Winners

JULY 9 – 2:00 and 4:30 p.m.

Make-A-Wish Concert

Simon Gledhill, Organist

AUGUST 13 – 2:00 p.m.

RON BICKEL and the

MERRYMAKERS JAZZ TRIO

SEPTEMBER 10 – 2:00 p.m.

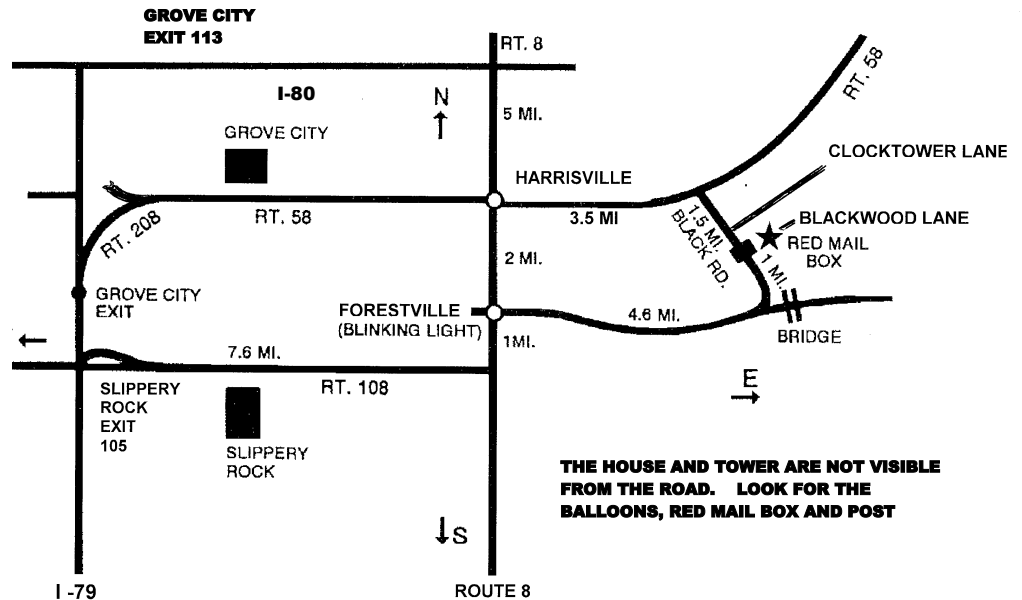
Silent Film "The General"

Dave Wickerham, Organist

OCTOBER 8 – 2:00 p.m.

Scholarship Dinner Concert

Jonas Nordwall, Organist



BLACKWOOD – 118 Blackwood Lane, Harrisville, PA 724 - 735 2813

NEWSLETTER

Blackwood Theater Organ Society
118 Blackwood Lane
Harrisville, PA 16038

